

The State Registration of Trained Nurses.

REGISTRATION AS IT AFFECTS GENERAL HOSPITALS.*

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It is with much diffidence that I rise to practically prophesy what will be the result of Registration on the great training-schools for nurses. Registration is not yet an accomplished fact, and we can only conjecture the results. It has been my lot, during the many years I have worked as a nurse, to see how curiously different the actual results of a measure may be from those anticipated by its supporters. One can never, in this most uncertain of worlds, quite gauge what the long-reaching consequences of any Act will be. With all the confidence I have in the necessity of Registration, and its ultimate benefit to all trained nurses in the most essential matters, I approach the prophecy I must make with misgiving.

To even faintly estimate the result of Registration, we must go over some old ground and look for a moment at the present condition of the training-schools. Although the divergence in the methods and results of training is not so great as it was some years ago, still it is even now considerable. There are still schools which give a certificate after two years, and where the nurses spend the following year or two years doing private nursing, where pupils are appointed to Sisters' posts after one year's training, and so on. Every training-school now is a law unto itself, has its own standard of efficiency and its own methods of ascertaining who among its nurses reaches that standard. To put it shortly, there is no uniform standard of training, no received curriculum of study, and no uniformity of results.

The only cure for this state of matters is Legal Registration.

The first probable result of Legal Registration will be the definition of the term "Trained Nurse." It will no longer connote a woman who has spent some time in a hospital, or a woman who wears a nurse's uniform. It will be applied only to women who, after a definite period spent in the wards of the hospital, and a defined course of study, have passed an examination conducted by examiners appointed by the legal authority.

This at once means that the length of time a candidate must pass in the wards of a hospital will be definitely settled, a curriculum of subjects for

study suggested, and that the knowledge gained practically and theoretically will be tested by an examination held outside the hospital and by legally-appointed examiners. The efficiency of a training-school will not then be determined by its own appreciation, but by the number of successful candidates it sends to the examinations.

The amount of teaching will increase, and more time will be allowed for study, and, though the hours of ward work will be shorter, the whole life of a nurse will become much more strenuous.

An increase of teaching and a decrease of the hours of ward work will increase the expenses of the nursing staff of the hospital, and then the authorities will have to decide what amount of the income derived from charity and given for the sick poor can rightly be spent in nurses' education. I should imagine that the decision come to will result in the decrease of the pay of the probationer and the increase of the pay of a fully-trained nurse. Certain subjects, such as cooking, massage, &c., which the nurse cannot extensively practise in the hospital, will have to be acquired in a preparatory school or in the hospital, and in either case a fee will have to be paid.

The broad results, then, of Registration on the training-schools will be, I take it, increase in theoretical instruction, shorter hours in the wards, a more strenuous life all round for the probationer, a decrease in the payment of probationers—perhaps the institution of a general premium—and an increase in the pay of the fully-trained nurse.

I am never one of the people who see in a new thing only that which is good, and although since I was a probationer myself, now twenty-four years ago, I have always advocated Registration, and firmly believe that in essential matters it will do much for the nurse, yet I foresee some changes which, I fear me, will creep into the training-schools. An undue importance will be given to theoretical work, and I think an almost inevitable decadence in practical work will supervene—at least, that is the evil I fear. That is merely the moan of a timid person who is apt to fear the unknown.

Registration we must have, and for the first time with this Society, and the help of such women as our President I feel we have really set our faces like a flint and have started on the road that leads there. Registration, one may say, is almost within our grasp. Don't let us expect too much from it. With it will not dawn the day of perfection; it is merely a step—a big step—in the way to that most illusive and impossible of conditions. It won't make us all good; it won't even make us all good nurses; but it will help the best and exclude the worst, and what can one ask more?

When the pupil has to pay for the instruction she receives, her training will be placed on the right basis, namely, the educational one.

* Read at the Conjoint Conference held in London, May 8th.

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