

Annotations.

OUR NEW PRIZE COMPETITION.

We have much pleasure in announcing that we propose to award each quarter a prize of FIVE GUINEAS for the best article on some Practical Nursing subject, with illustrations of the text. The length of the article is to be about 2,000 words. We will publish next week the conditions of the competition. The first prize will be awarded on June 22nd, and all articles competing for it must be received by the Editor not later than Saturday, June 17th.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION OF DISCIPLINE.

An important point, involving the maintenance of good discipline and order amongst the nursing staff as well as the efficiency of the nursing in the wards, was brought up at a meeting of the Board of Management of the Swansea Hospital, specially summoned to consider the matter.

The Matron alleged that Dr. Lancaster, Hon. Medical Officer, interfered with her in her duties, and had sent nurses off duty without consulting her. The matter was in the first instance dealt with by the House Committee, who arrived at the following conclusion:—

"That it rests with the medical officer to decide whether a nurse is in a proper state of health to be on duty, and that when the medical officer decides that a nurse is not in a fit state for duty the Matron should be immediately informed."

The Matron, Miss Prudence Crispin, then appealed to the Board of Management.

The Chairman regarded the issue as a very trivial one, and invited Dr. Lancaster and the Matron to shake hands and start afresh. Dr. Lancaster objected to the impression that he had a vulgar quarrel with the Matron. It was a question of principle—i.e., whether the nurses were to be treated with common humanity or not. The Matron, on her part, stated that Dr. Lancaster claimed, and on two occasions had exercised, the right to treat and send off duty any nurse or Sister without consulting her.

It appears from Dr. Lancaster's statement to the Committee that he considers nurses have been allowed to go on duty when not in a fit condition to do so. His complaint, he said, was that the Matron let nurses run down without his knowing, not once, but five times.

Dr. Lancaster is, of course, quite within his right in maintaining that the nurses' health should be adequately looked after, and sick

nurses promptly reported to him, and if the Committee have reason to consider this is not done they will no doubt intimate the fact to the Matron.

But the principal grievance of the Matron, and it is a real one, is that the House Surgeon, Dr. Florence Price, who was supported by Dr. Lancaster, sent a nurse off duty without informing her at the time or subsequently. This Dr. Price admitted to the Committee, saying that she "did not know it was the rule."

It will be seen, therefore, that the issue is not trivial, for the Matron, as head of the nursing staff, is held responsible not only for the efficient nursing of the wards, but also for the well-being of the nurses. It is quite impossible for her to make adequate nursing arrangements if the nurses are to be removed from the wards without reference to her.

In the second place, if a nurse is not well it is her duty to report herself sick to her superior officer, the Matron. It then becomes the Matron's duty to communicate at once with the responsible medical officer, who will decide whether the nurse is fit or unfit for duty. The Matron should be at once informed of his decision by the medical officer, and if the nurse is to come off duty, the Matron will communicate with the Sister and make suitable arrangements to supply another nurse to fill her place. To suggest that the matter can be settled by the doctor and the Matron shaking hands is quite futile. Each believes he or she is in the right, and it is the duty of the committee to define the position of each. Dr. Lancaster objects to the matter being treated as a vulgar quarrel. It must be remembered that all quarrels are vulgar, and that differences of this kind should be discussed with mutual courtesy, but Dr. Lancaster has put himself quite in the wrong by ordering a nurse or nurses off duty without first communicating with their superior officer, the Matron. This, it appears to us, is the source of all the trouble, and it would be wise for both the committee and Dr. Lancaster to recognise it. We think the Matron did wisely in bringing the matter to the attention of the Board of Management, and it is to be regretted that they did not take a more decided line than to endorse the recommendations of the House Committee. We hope the Board will reconsider this matter, and render to each official the authority which is their right, and without which neither good order or discipline can be maintained.

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