

The Midwife.

The Oldest of Arts and the Youngest of Sciences.

In an interesting paper, read before the Chicago Society of Superintendents of Training Schools, Mrs. Emma Koch, Superintendent of Nurses at the Chicago Lying-in Hospital, urged the better training of obstetric nurses. Obstetrics is, she says, one of the most exact of the inexact sciences of medicine. Therefore, in the practice of its art one may develop a certain method, a routine of doing things which will apply to nearly all cases. This is called obstetric technique, and, although obstetrics is the oldest of arts, it is one of the youngest of sciences, and although the obstetricians were the first to preach and practice asepsis and antisepsis, the hospitals are last in adopting a good obstetric technique.

The importance of teaching the principles underlying obstetric work are emphasised by Mrs. Koch by showing that when these are not well taught the nurse leaves the obstetric ward with a feeling of relief and often disgust. She has worked hard, has learned little, has obtained no enduring methods, has seen no ideals of practice, and has attained none. A crying baby means peppermint water and nothing else; an incubator baby is a nightmare of blue spells; a puerpera means nothing more to her than castor oil and external dressings. She has not been taught to observe the daily changes occurring in the little being lying in the crib; she has not seen the earliest developments of the mind, the changes of the skin, of the intestinal tract, the circulation, the shape of head and body, and all the wonderful phenomena that go to make up life, and the preparation of the individual for adult existence. To her a labour is a long vigil of watching suffering, and a bewildered assistance at the delivery of the infant. The mighty occurrences of labour are meaningless. The mechanism of labour the protection Nature gives the mother against infection and hæmorrhage, the change of the child's life from intra to extra uterine, all these are thrilling and magnetic stories, but a closed book to her.

The grandeur of the science of obstetrics thus being unknown to the nurse, and the practice of the art being so desultory and unsatisfactory, the nurse regards her obstetric

training as a necessary punishment, and usually resolves "never to take obstetric cases when she gets out."

One of the main objects of the foundation of the Chicago Lying-in Hospital Dispensary was to raise the standards of teaching and of practice, and thus to improve the conditions of the lying-in woman.

Gradually the technique was perfected as nearly as possible. What was best in the practice of other hospitals was adopted, many details were eliminated, and many new ones added.

The Chicago Lying-In Hospital now has a system that may be called its own, and though by no means perfect it has produced very satisfactory results. There have been but two deaths from sepsis in all the six and one-half years. One woman had gonorrhœa and pyosalpinx when she entered labour, the other a case of physometra, thoroughly septic on entering.

Nurses ought, says Mrs. Koch, to get much longer obstetric training than they do to-day.

A nurse should be prepared for the work she is to do when she goes into practice, and since obstetric cases form at least one-third of her work, one-sixth of her time in the hospital ought to be devoted to obstetrics. The surgical cases go to the hospitals for treatment, and they should go.

It is the intention of the Chicago Lying-in Hospital to offer the following course of obstetric training:

First: One month with the mothers, on day and night duty.

Second: One month in the nursery and the incubator station.

Third: One month in the confinement room, where she will attend fifty to seventy-five deliveries, and see all kinds of operations and complications.

Fourth: One month in the out department or dispensary service, where the nurse will learn how to do good work under most unfavourable surroundings.

There are to be in the new hospital paid instructors, so that the technique taught will be consistent and permanent, and arrangements are being made so as to have recreation rooms and ample accommodations for nurses, so that the necessarily onerous duties shall be as light as possible, and enough nurses may be taken to do the work properly.

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