

The Special Nursing of the Ear and Nose.

NURSING LECTURES DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL EAR HOSPITAL.

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INTRODUCTORY.

The remarkable growth of medical and surgical knowledge which necessarily followed upon the outburst of scientific thought in the second half of the nineteenth century could only be continued by means of specialisation, in its various departments. As a result of this specialisation, each organ and system of the body has come to have a large literature of its own, and a group of physicians or surgeons who have made of each a special study. Such specialism was viewed with grave distrust by the old school of doctors, but the attitude of suspicion assumed by them is fast disappearing, with, I think, advantage to the patients, and certainly with advantage to medicine and surgery. Within very recent times, the large general hospitals have seen fit to place proved specialists in charge of the special departments instead of leaving them to the tender mercies of assistant surgeons who used them as stepping stones to other appointments, and this fact speaks eloquently as a sign of the times.

Now, with this growth of specialism, the nurse, as a distinct and necessary part of the great body politic of the medical profession, must keep pace. It is a necessity to the adequate treatment of the patient that she should be familiar with the special methods used in dealing with special parts, and some knowledge of each specialty should, therefore, be included in her training if she wishes to be in a position to undertake any case at a moment's notice. If it be an operation upon the eye, she should have a knowledge of ophthalmic nursing; if it be a mastoid case, she should be acquainted with the work of the aural surgeon; and when a nurse has to look after the instruments needed for some special operation, a want of knowledge of those required for the manipulations of the specialist may cause her some embarrassment.

Quite lately, certain special hospitals have started special instruction to nurses, a training greatly needed. I am not aware, however, that any instruction has yet been given in the duties of a nurse in dealing with ear and nose cases. It is, therefore, only fitting that such a course of instruction should be first organised in this, the oldest special hospital in the world.

Now, no man can ever become a good specialist unless he has first acquired a sound knowledge of general medicine and surgery, and, if possible, of general practice also. I have often found cause to be thankful for the two years I devoted to general practice when I first started my professional work. Similarly, it is impossible for a nurse to make herself efficient in the care of special cases unless she has been, in the first instance, properly trained in the general principles of nursing. Mental nursing, fever nursing, the care of abdominal operations or of gynaecological cases have been recognised as requiring special training for quite a long time. Eye and ear nursing requires equally special training, and, just as the ear has been neglected hitherto in the curriculum of the medical student, so has it been disregarded in the training of the nurse. Of course, I do not intend in these lectures to enter into such matters of general nursing as the making of beds, keeping of charts, and the like. It is in the application of remedies to the ear or nose that the nurse is usually lacking in knowledge. The simple operation of syringing the ear, for instance, is one that she seldom performs efficiently for the simple reason that no one ever teaches her. When, some years ago, I had charge of the ear department of a general hospital, I was usually given a different nurse each week, and their inability to properly syringe an ear was then brought home to me very forcibly, for I had to waste much of my time teaching the nurse instead of seeing the numerous patients.

Before commencing the essential part of these lectures, it will be necessary to give a short account of the anatomy and physiology of the ear and nose, and I shall commence with the former organ.

THE ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY OF HEARING.

Just as light, acting through certain conducting media, produces its impression upon the special ending of the optic nerve, so do the waves of sound act upon the termination of the auditory nerve, and give us the sensation of hearing. But the ear has a two-fold function; it not only contains the organ of hearing; but it has also to do with our sense of equilibrium. We are here, however, more concerned with the former than the latter sense.

The ear may be divided into two portions, speaking physiologically, the *conducting* part and the *perceiving* part. Anatomically, there are three distinct divisions, *outer*, *middle*, and *inner ear* (See Figure). The *outer ear* consists of the *pinna* or *auricle*, built up of cartilage, and the *external meatus*, or canal, leading into the head. This canal is not straight, but

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