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Editorial.

THE REVERENT CARE OF THE DEAD.

From time to time the fact that mistakes occur in notifying the relatives of a patient, who is still living, that his death has occurred, as recently happened at the Bermondsey Parish Infirmary, and in some cases even in the burial of a late patient by the relatives of another, is an indication of the great care which is necessary if such mistakes are not to be made—mistakes which if they happened in the case of those in a higher rank of life would occasion a sensation giving rise to indignant comment in every paper.

The care of the dead is a matter which should be thought out and provided for in every nursing school, for the bodies of those who have died in the wards should not pass out of the care of the nursing staff until they pass out of that of the hospital, and, as division of responsibility is a fruitful source of mistakes, one person should be responsible for the care of the dead from the time that the bodies leave the wards until they leave the institution.

No hard and fast method can be laid down which will suit every institution, but, as a rule, it is found convenient that a nurse attached to the outpatient department should be responsible for the care of the mortuary. When a death is notified from a ward, and the removal of a body requested, she should accompany the porters who perform the removal. This is best accomplished with a hand-bier, provided with a small mattress covered with American cloth, which can be made up as a bed with linen kept for mortuary purposes, and covered by a pall. This is preferably made of white linen with a border, or cross, of turkey twill, so that it can be easily and frequently washed. On this bed the body can usually remain until it has been viewed by the relatives, a much

better and less harrowing arrangement than that the friends should see it for the first time in one of the shells provided by the institution; and another point of practical interest is that it is much more easily removed from this temporary bed to the coffin provided subsequently by the relatives than when it has been placed in a shell.

A definite procedure should always be adopted when a body is removed. The nurse to be subsequently responsible should receive it from the ward sister, and see that the card giving details of the name, age, date of death, &c., of the patient is attached. She should then accompany the bier to the mortuary, and see everything arranged in a seemly and orderly manner before she leaves. She should visit the mortuary daily, and always before any relatives are admitted, so as to see that everything is in order, and should then accompany the friends. If any *post mortem* examination is made she must also see that proper arrangements are made before and after; and no undertaker should be admitted to the mortuary without being accompanied by the nurse, who should be held responsible by the authorities of the institution for the delivery of the right body to the undertaker, and should witness its removal. Not until this has been accomplished should her responsibility cease. It is only by safeguards of this nature that mistakes can be prevented which are not creditable to a public institution, and which outrage the feelings of the survivors.

It is surely seemly that relatives should be received and taken to the mortuary by a nurse rather than by a porter. The mortuaries are some of the last departments of our hospitals to be brought up to date, but we are glad to know that much has been done in regard to the provision of better accommodation of recent years, and we hope increased efficiency in organisation will follow.

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