

Neurasthenia from the Nurse's Point of View.*

In considering the subject of neurasthenia it will be understood that this paper treats not of the province of the physician or of the instructions that the nurse receives from him, for it is the nurse's duty to follow the physician's instructions, but of that indefinable sum of points, facts, relations, and activities, and the innumerable mass of details, large and small, that together go to make up the whole that is called nursing.

In the first place, the neurasthenic, as he or she comes under the nurse's observation and treatment, presents himself or herself to the mind of the nurse as a being composed of three essential, distinct, and complex parts (body, mind, and soul), and one in whom conditions and functions of some one (though seldom only one), two, or all, and usually all, of these three parts are in some way or other perverted from the conditions of health; and while it is no part of the nurse's duty to enter into the study of morbid material conditions that have helped to produce the general state of constitutional disorganisation and demoralisation and wholly unfit the subjects of it to perform their part in life, it is her duty and work to combat by every means in her power those perverted conditions, and to lend her assistance so that, by the united efforts of medical science, the trained skill of the nurse, and that moral awakening, renewal, and activity that it is or should be the object of every nurse to arouse in her patient, the one for the time overcome by the conspiracy of disposition, character, physical weakness, or disease and circumstances, may be lifted up and set again on his or her feet strengthened and encouraged to again take up the burden of life, without feeling that the odds are all against them.

I might mention first, and dismiss, that class of cases needing only rest and building up, those suffering from an apparently simple exhaustion of brain and spinal cord matter, as evidenced by a greater or less degree of difficulty in performing the ordinary labours, physical and mental, of life, without any great disturbance of physical organs and functions, excepting a run-down condition or the usual perversities, mental and moral, of nervous patients.

As met with in a nurse's experience, one may say that a neurasthenic is always run down; the tissues are all deteriorated; and

the physical functions all more or less at fault; and this manifests itself by a combination of aches and pains and ailments, real and imaginary, more varied than any healthy imagination could picture or ordinary pen describe; and where one has such conditions before her continually influenced by the morbid mental and moral state usual to these patients, it is hardly needful to say that neurasthenia cannot be written or read on paper; it is written, and can only be read, in the living and wholly to be unenvied, subject of it; and then when I recall the fact that these cases are frequently complicated with hysteria, even the inexperienced, I think, would understand that nursing neurasthenic patients is, to say the least of it, difficult.

Without entering into any detailed discussion of physical conditions, that particularly interest and concern the nurse, I might note in passing some of the most conspicuous of them.

In these cases loss of weight is usually to be observed, sometimes to the degree of emaciation, while what, for the want of a better term, we may speak of as "tone and fibre," are always markedly deficient (deficient in mind and character, as well as in body), the tissues as far as sight and touch can perceive being soft and flabby, while those beyond observation, reasoning from the general condition and inefficiency of function, may, I think, be assumed to be the same; and with these facts one is prepared to find an endless train of symptoms, such as lassitude, pain, neuralgia, and of other nature often real and severe, often also exaggerated, not infrequently imaginary or largely so; sleeplessness, perverted sensations, loss of or intensified sensation, headache; all the symptoms of alimentary disturbance; constipation being most invariable; palpitation, irregularity, and weakness of heart; muscular weakness, cramps, and such like; dry, harsh skin; imperfect action of the kidneys; disturbed conditions of the menstrual function; and so on as far as one wishes to look for symptoms, yet all pointing in the same direction.

Passing from the consideration of symptoms that are more directly or manifestly connected with material conditions in the body, we come to that set of symptoms that present themselves to the attention of the nurse as manifestations of conditions or attitude of mind and soul, though in the further discussion of the subject I shall allude to the latter under the more conventional form of "character." It is this set of symptoms, or, to be more explicit, the conditions from which they arise, that place neurasthenic patients in a class by

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