

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
**THE NURSING RECORD**  
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,216.

SATURDAY, JULY 22, 1911

XLVII.

## Editorial.

### THE SCARCITY OF NURSES.

The Matron of the Lambeth Infirmary has presented an important report to the Board of Guardians dealing with the increasing difficulty of obtaining suitable probationers.

The report states that hospitals and infirmaries are enlarging their staffs to cope with the demands made upon them by modern medical methods. At the same time new institutions demanding large staffs are continually being opened, and all try to get their nursing done in the cheapest way, namely by training probationers, who do harder work, and demand a much lower rate of payment than trained nurses do.

Thus the demand for probationers is on the increase, while, at the same time, the supply is steadily diminishing, as so many fresh occupations are now open to educated women, giving them a far wider field than formerly from which to select a congenial career. Of those women who still desire to enter the nursing profession, the large general hospitals absorb the best, the choice left to infirmary Matrons is small, and they are sometimes obliged to take candidates of whom their judgment does not wholly approve. Many desirable candidates are deterred from entering the Infirmary for training, because they cannot possibly manage for their first year on a salary of £7.

The Matron also states that in her opinion the work in the wards is too hard and the hours too long. The nurses are so mentally and physically tired from their hard work and long hours on duty, that even if they were women of far higher intellectual powers, and more advanced education than is the case, they would find it difficult to assimilate what is taught.

A more generous scale of off duty time than is now allowed is very greatly to be desired. Also owing to illness it is seldom that the staff is at its full strength, and more nurses should be employed. Sometimes there is only one nurse in charge of 31 beds. On night duty each nurse has an average of 34 patients under her charge. The calls during the night for a nurse to go out with the ambulance or to attend patients in the receiving ward are very frequent, when a floor of over sixty beds is left to one nurse. Urgent operations may have to be done in the night, a delirious patient may need a special nurse, and there are no reserve nurses. Dr. Baly, the Medical Superintendent, in forwarding the report expressed his agreement with the conclusions arrived at therein.

We congratulate Miss Byles on presenting this report, and the Guardians on accepting and adopting the advice of their expert officer, and agreeing to the concessions which it suggests, and to the appointment of additional nurses and probationers.

The principle underlying the whole report is the plea for the better organisation of nursing education.

But, undoubtedly, the strongest influence in deterring women from adopting nursing as a profession is that when they have faithfully served an adequate apprenticeship, they have no recognised position in the community, and their skilled work counts for little more than that of women who have not fulfilled their term of training, with whom certificated nurses are expected to work on equal terms. Until the State places its imprimatur on efficiency, and differentiates the trained from the semi-trained and untrained woman, so long will many girls seeking for a career, and often the most desirable, select other branches of work than nursing.

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