

The Midwife.

THE MIDWIFERY CONFERENCE.

TUESDAY, APRIL 23rd.

FIRST SESSION.

Dr. Prudence Gaffikin presided at the first session of the Midwifery Conference, in connection with the Nursing and Midwifery Exhibition, held at the London County Council Technical Institute, Westminster.

MIDWIVES AND INFANT MANAGEMENT.

Dr. Eric Pritchard, Senior Assistant Physician at the Queen's Hospital for Children, N.E., presented a most interesting paper on "The Training of Midwives from the Point of View of Infant Management," a question which he holds to be in close relationship with that of infant mortality. "The younger the infant the more dependent is it on the conditions of the environment; it is therefore during the most critical period of its existence that the arbitrament of its fate rests in the hands of the midwife, whose will is supreme and whose word is law during these early days."

Dr. Pritchard said in part: "That midwives can do magnificent work when they are properly instructed and informed is proved by the triumphs which have crowned their efforts in the prevention of ophthalmia neonatorum and puerperal fever. . . . If midwives can deal with such scourges as gonorrhoeal ophthalmia and puerperal fever, they can certainly deal with the same success with many of the common evils to which new-born infants are subject. Only they must be properly taught and properly instructed."

"I do not think much fault can be found with the schedule of requirements as demanded by the C.M.B. . . . A careful scrutiny of the schedule of requirements should, I think, convince any impartial person that if its provisions were honestly carried out by both teacher and candidate, they would be amply sufficient to ensure an adequate education for the practising midwife. But that such knowledge could be acquired by a previously uninstructed person within the prescribed period of three months involves an effort of the imagination which can hardly be expected of any sane individual. Within the narrow compass of three months how can any individual be expected to acquire proficiency in the management of labour, the management of the infant, not to speak of learning how to recognise the presence of serious complications, the significance of rashes, and the evidence of venereal disease? Many a woman can be present at and even be responsible for the management of 20 labours without seeing a single complication, a single rash, or a single symptom of venereal disease in the parent or in the child, and yet at the end of this period the law allows her to take upon herself one of the greatest

responsibilities that can devolve on any human individual, namely, the care and management of a mother and child at the most critical period of their respective lives.

"I have recently made a tour of inspection of several of the Metropolitan lying-in institutions, with the object of ascertaining what kind of education it is possible to give to intending midwives within the prescribed period of three months. Excellently conducted as some of these institutions are, especially with respect to the facilities which they afford for acquiring a knowledge of the practice of obstetrics, it is impossible to deny that even the best of them are incapable of turning out even a tolerably efficient midwife within the period of time that is prescribed by the Midwives Act of 1902.

"I believe, however, that at the end of their training in properly equipped Metropolitan institutions intending candidates are relatively proficient in the practice of obstetrics. As regards their proficiency in the management of infants, I am not prepared to go bail, and for this I unhesitatingly blame the authorities of Lying-in Institutions, and the system of subordinating the interest of the infants to the interests of the mother."

Dr. Pritchard states that we are much behind foreign authorities in regard to the management of the breast-feeding of infants; that only in one institution in England is the precaution of estimating what the infant receives by means of the "Test Feed" observed; and that in relation to the stools, sore buttocks and their prevention, the meconium, green stools, thrush, &c., more systematic instruction should be given. He attributes this neglect in matters of detail to the fact that the nursing staff in many maternity hospitals are decidedly overworked, and cannot give sufficient time to the individual teaching of the pupils; and is also of opinion that sufficient regard is not paid to the individual capabilities of the Sisters and Midwives, who are responsible for instructing the pupils. Teaching is a gift, and it by no means follows that the best midwives and the best ward sisters are the best teachers.

He thinks further that every sane person must agree that it is impossible to train a midwife or a maternity nurse in three months, and would like to see the period extended to two years for those with no previous experience in general nursing, and to one year for those who have had such experience. He suggests the establishment of an "Infant Consultation" department, in charge of a member of the medical staff, in connection with lying-in hospitals, for babies born in the service of the institution and the immediate neighbourhood; and, thirdly, that a system for inducing midwives to return to their training school for post-graduate instruction after three or four years should be established.

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