

undertake ordinary nursing break down if they attempt midwifery.

A fruitful source of overstrain is the inequitable endeavour of some hospital authorities and private employers to extract work from their nurses to the utmost limit, without giving a due equivalent in training or in cash. Women's labour is cheap and plentiful; when some fall out of the ranks others are ready to take their place, especially in the ranks of hospital nurses. But it is not only wrong, but stupid, to reduce one set of people to ill-health by overwork in order to restore another set to health, and the just employer will realise that he has obligations as well as rights, chief amongst them that of safeguarding the health of the workers for whom he is responsible.

Nothing is a more fruitful source of overstrain than lack of knowledge. Knowledge gives confidence and a sense of power to deal with difficult situations which is otherwise unattainable, hence the responsibility resting upon hospital authorities to provide adequate instruction and experience for their pupils. Only last year, at an inquest which occurred into the circumstances of the death of a patient at a leading London hospital, in which the night nurse had administered an ounce instead of a drachm of morphia draught, the nurse informed the jury that the nurses were not trained as to fatal doses of poisons—they had to find that out for themselves. Again, where the term of training is inadequate, and the experience of the nurse in consequence insufficient, overstrain occurs. Take the instance of a nurse sent out from the private nursing staff of a large hospital to a case of enteric fever, when she has never nursed or even seen one during her brief training; happily the patient recovered, but at what cost of mental anxiety and overstrain this nurse cared for the case she alone knows.

Conscientiousness, again, adds to the strain on the worker—a strain unknown to worthies of the type of Sarah Gamp and Betsey Prig. You remember Betsey's instructions to her colleague when handing over her patient for the night: "The easy chair ain't soft enough. You want his piller." The tension through the long night hours on the nurse sensitive to every need of her patient, alert to every change, questioning herself if she has done all in her power for his welfare in nowise affected such self-indulgent callous workers, who were untouched also by the exhaustion consequent upon the claims of sickness on a sympathetic nature, which suffers in unison with those whom it serves.

Again, there is the overstrain of systematic overwork. Occasional overwork, caused by the

inevitable stress of the situation, is cheerfully endured by any nurse worthy of her vocation, and combated by rest and relaxation between cases when the strain is over. For this reason the practice of employing nurses in the wards of a hospital between private cases is to be deprecated. The nurse who goes from one acute case to another where her rest is broken and her sleep limited, needs a few days between them to recover physical, mental, and spiritual poise, and it is shortsighted policy to make her do ward work until the next call comes, perhaps for night duty with an anxious case at the end of a hard day's work. Should a nurse need to bring her knowledge up to date, surely she should be taken off private duty and return to hospital for a definite period.

Then there is the overstrain resulting from the callous and deliberate sweating of nurses for money-making purposes, an example of which is to be found in the case of a nurse employed at a salary of some £30 a year by the proprietress of a private nursing home, who charges patients as much as twenty guineas a week. This nurse was required to do five hours' massage daily, and when she represented to her employer that it was impossible to get it in, and that for days she had not been able to go down to dinner, she was told that that was her affair. The nurse confided to a friend the temptation to commit suicide. There is no excuse for such deliberate sweating to satisfy an employer's greed of gold.

Few persons realise that while the ordinary able-bodied man considers eight hours a day, with a weekly half-holiday, besides a day of rest on Sunday, constitute a good week's work, at least ten to twelve hours a day for seven days a week, or nights, when the strain is increased, is expected of most nurses. Indeed, nursing is one of the most exacting callings in this respect, yet no one has ever suggested for this reason that it is not women's work. Nursing is universally regarded as essentially a calling for women. It is therefore illogical to close the doors of any other profession against them on the ground of its strenuousness.

Another cause of overstrain is poverty. Nurses, when in institutions, usually receive minute salaries, out of which they have not only to defray their personal expenses and put by for the days when they can no longer work, but also frequently assist relatives more or less dependent upon them, and this lack of funds unquestionably is a factor in causing overstrain. District nurses, again, are often very poorly paid, and it is quite usual in England to see an advertisement for a district nurse at £50 to £60 a year, out of which she is required to

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