

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

HOW WOULD YOU NURSE A PATIENT SUFFERING FROM RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Lily Barraclough, Newton Heath, Manchester.

PRIZE PAPER.

Patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis require very great care and attention. In the early stages they suffer most acute pain, and it is often very difficult to give them rest and comfort for any length of time. As the disease becomes more advanced, the joints often become stiff and contorted, but the pain is not so acute, except on moving, which must be done with the greatest care. As these patients are nearly always confined to their beds, it is advisable, where possible, to choose a room which is airy, bright, and with as much sunshine as one can get. The bed should consist of a firm mattress, and be made up with blankets, with mackintosh and draw-sheet—the latter prevents any irritation to the back—which blankets sometimes cause, and also can be drawn at intervals to cool the patient.

It is always useful to have a couch in patient's room, so that he or she can be lifted out for a few hours daily. This makes a great change to a bedridden patient, if it can be managed. They should be sponged daily, as a preventive of bed sores, and also for personal comfort, owing to the unpleasant exudation from the skin. All bony prominences should be gently rubbed with methylated spirit, and starch powder freely used in all crevices of the skin to prevent chafing. Their clothing should be made of woollen material, light and warm, made loose and fastened with tapes, that they can be removed as easily as possible. Small pillows and soft cushions are almost indispensable to these patients, and give great relief if placed where there is any pressure. Water beds and air cushions and rings are very useful, but cannot always be procured, and it is possible to keep patients free from pressure sores without their aid.

It is very necessary to keep patients' bowels open daily, either by simple saline aperients or by a simple enema, if they are very difficult in that way. The diet should be light and nourishing. Cleanliness and brightness in the patient's surroundings do much toward cheering up the invalid, whose life often has to be spent in one room.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss Dora Vine, Miss Gladys Tatham, Miss O'Brien, Miss B. James, Miss

A. Smith, Miss Endall, Miss M. Mackintosh, Miss E. Dymes.

Miss Gladys Tatham writes:—The nurse will carry out the treatment ordered by the physician. Massage is frequently given in the earlier stages of the disease. Autogenous vaccines are administered if any septic condition can be treated, *e.g.*, in pyorrhœa of the gums due to carious teeth.

Rest in bed is usually necessary. If the pain is severe, heat should be applied to the affected joints. Dry heat gives most relief in such cases. Thermogene wool applied to the joint is often comforting. Rheumatic Phylacogenes may be used when autogenous vaccines are unobtainable. When the pain becomes unbearably severe, the doctor usually orders opiates, which it will be the duty of the nurse to give— $\frac{1}{2}$ gr. morphine is often ordered hypodermically.

Rheumatic arthritic patients require very tender nursing. Their whole system, physical and nervous, is upset and super-sensitive. The nurse must be ready to try to alleviate their sufferings in every way—by physical means, such as heat, gentle massage, analgesics, &c. By mental means, distracting the patient's attention from his own condition as much as possible by keeping him interested in other matters, and encouraging any special hobbies he may be able to pursue in bed, *e.g.*, stamp collecting. In many cases direct hypnotic suggestion gives wonderfully encouraging results in soothing pain and procuring sleep, but a nurse should not experiment on a patient unless she has hypnotised before, or at least understands the process, and never without explicit medical direction.

Miss Dymes writes:—The patient should always wear woollen garments or woven silk and wool next the skin. The latter is better if the skin is very sensitive. If the patient is able to be up, but at the same time helpless, it is a wise plan to have all skirts and petticoats made to button one side from the waist to the hem; they can then be rolled under the patient when lying on the bed. When the arms are painful, have the dress bodice made in two pieces to fasten back and front, which does away with having to move painful arms. Nightgowns also should be made to button on both shoulders, and the seam of the sleeves to button from shoulder to wrist. This is most useful when having to bathe the arms at bedtime.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

Mention some nursing expedients which you have seen in district and school nursing.

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