

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TRAINED NURSES.

THE BIRMINGHAM CONFERENCE.

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MORNING SESSION.

JUNE 11TH.

NURSING UNDER THE INSURANCE ACT.

Miss M. Huxley presided at the Morning Session of the Conference, on Thursday, June 11th, when Nursing under the Insurance Act was the subject of the deeply interesting speech of Sir Victor Horsley, F.R.S., F.R.C.S. He was careful to emphasize the fact that nursing is an essential part of medical work. It was quite extraordinary what an enormous mass of people at the present time went through illness without being nursed. The district nursing associations had done a great deal to remove this reproach but the feeling existed strongly in the mind of the public that nursing was a kind of appendage, not an actual necessity, to medical treatment. There was a popular tradition, which had to be destroyed, that a nurse was not needed because a wife could do all that was necessary for her husband. The Insurance Act was an instrument with which to achieve this end. He was of opinion that it would bring home to the people that if they were capably nursed they would make not only a quicker but a better recovery. It was a point which was plain to the pathologist, but not always to the public.

The Approved Societies stood to gain enormously if a complete system were brought about of National Insurance Nursing. The Insurance Act was drafted with an extraordinary amount of foresight, for which its author appeared to have received more abuse than credit. Mr. Lloyd George had looked a-head, so as to bring about a condition of things under which friendly societies could give additional benefits in future. The prospect of a society fulfilling that obligation depended on the success with which the people were being treated at the moment.

The nursing question was no mere academic one, it was of vital importance to the nation and to the Approved Societies. With their heavy responsibilities, it was not reasonable to ask friendly societies to nurse the insured person. The Nursing Benefit must therefore be provided by the State.

Sir Victor spoke of the usefulness of the work of the Association of Approved Societies, and said that in an interim report it pointed out that Nursing Benefit must be given and financed by the State. In the Budget this year £50,000 had been allotted to Nursing Benefit, and next year £250,000 would be allowed and then the ship would be launched. The nursing profession were therefore, in the fortunate position that they were dealing with an accomplished fact, and what they had to see was that the ship sailed forward on a safe voyage.

The speaker reminded his audience that the public has a duty to the Nursing Profession, and the Nursing Profession to the public. The interests of both were identical, as were those of the Medical Profession and the public. People sometimes spoke as if there was a difference between the two, but the two professions were parallel. If the State employed nurses, then they must be recognised as trained persons. The insured person deserved, and must have the best nursing, and it was the duty of the State to see that he got it, therefore the vital national importance of the State Registration of Trained Nurses must be recognised. It was essential, and there could be no real reform without it.

Insured persons, as those most interested, should be warned to see that when nursing contracts were made they were made with nurses with three years' hospital training, who should be on a State Register. The question of the nursing of the sick by untrained persons was an old one. When Mr. Ritchie was President of the Local Government Board he appointed a Committee to enquire into it, and they reported that the so-called assistant nurse, which meant an untrained person, ought to be abolished. That was ten or twelve years ago. Nevertheless, the assistant nurse was not only in full evidence at the present time, but was openly advertised for by Boards of Guardians. This should come to an end. It was the absence of registration, of proper hours, and time for recuperation that had led to such a state of things. All bodies responsible for the public health should press the Government to adopt the Nurses Registration Bill now in charge of Dr. Chapple in the House of Commons.

In speaking of the obvious necessity of fully-trained nurses for nursing the poor in their own homes, Sir Victor said that no nurse ought to remain in an isolated part for too long a time, as her efficiency would suffer.

The shortage of trained nurses in the rural districts was due to the conditions under which they worked. The view was current among the charitable and the philanthropic public that it was not necessary to have a fully-trained nurse in the rural districts. From the public health point of view that was a criminal view, because the nurses in the rural districts were engaged on more important work than those in the urban districts, where a doctor could be easily obtained. Poor pay meant poor service for poor people, and that was a national scandal in just the same way as was the Poor Law Medical Service, and was the outcome of what was falsely called charity. The insured person had the right to be properly treated.

It was therefore incumbent that the nursing profession should see that the national scheme was carried out by the State, administered through the Insurance Committees; and that the nursing contracts were given to properly qualified nurses.

He gave three reasons for the shortage of nurses, namely:—(1) Remuneration for skilled nursing was insufficient; (2) The hours on duty

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