

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

No. 1,397

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 1915.

Vol. LIV.

**EDITORIAL.**

**THE NEW PHARMACOPŒIA.**

The fact that in most British hospitals the education of nurses in regard to the drugs they are called upon to administer is practically neglected, renders it the more essential that nurses should themselves obtain an elementary knowledge of their uses and action. Just as it is now recognized that a nurse is an unsafe assistant to the surgeon unless she understands the principles underlying the practice of aseptic and antiseptic surgery, so she is an unsafe assistant to both physician and surgeon, unless she knows something of the drugs which they prescribe and she administers or applies, of the usual doses prescribed, of the effects they are intended to produce, and of the symptoms of over dosage.

Opening the last few volumes of this JOURNAL quite casually, we find recorded a number of deaths through errors in the administration or application of drugs—the death of a patient in an Irish hospital, who was so ill that it was doubtful how long he would have lasted apart from any misadventure, but which was certainly accelerated by the administration of a dose of crocylic acid, or some other constituent of tar oil in mistake for house mixture. The death of a patient in a provincial hospital, owing to a solution of carbolic 1 in 3 having been applied to her head by a probationer, instead of a diluted solution; the death of a patient at a London hospital, when the evidence at the subsequent inquest proved that the knowledge expected of the nurses concerning the effects of poisonous drugs was elementary. Quite recently there was a holocaust at Bethlem Hospital owing to an error in dispensing. All of which goes to show how easily fatal accidents may occur through any error on

the part of doctor, dispenser, or nurse, and the necessity for sound knowledge on the part of nurses concerning the dangerous drugs which they handle many times in the day.

For these reasons (although dispensing is not in the province of the trained nurse, unless she takes it as an additional qualification, and a very useful one too) we consider it essential to draw attention to the issue of a new British Pharmacopœia which came into force last week. It is specially important for two reasons, firstly because the metric system of weights and measures is introduced, at present as an alternative, but no doubt shortly to supersede the imperial system. Incidentally, as it now behoves all nurses to acquaint themselves with the metric system we may remind our readers that it is fully described, and compared with the apothecaries' measures in Miss Pope's Medical Dictionary for Nurses.

Secondly because in a number of instances the strength of dangerous drugs is changed. Tincture of opium is 33 per cent. stronger than formerly, and tincture of strophanthus is four times as strong. The pre-eminent influence of opium is upon the brain, as a stimulant, hypnotic, and narcotic. In poisonous doses it may cause prostration with profound coma. Strophanthus acts directly on the muscular tissue as a tonic, increasing its contractile power, and in poisonous doses, paralyzing it, and leaving it in a state of tetanic-like spasm. Nurses must therefore be on their guard, and if a full dose is ordered might inquire if the doctor intends it to be dispensed in accordance with the present pharmacopœia.

Those nurses who wish to learn elementary Materia Medica, as it is applied to their work, should study Miss L. L. Dock's Materia Medica for Nurses which they will find most interesting as well as illuminating.

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