

PRENATAL CARE.

Prenatal care as a systematized means of reducing infant mortality and of improving the health of the mothers is (says *The Canadian Nurse*) a new idea, but is one that is claiming, and rightly, a great deal of attention at the present time.

In its broadest sense, "prenatal care is," to quote Dr. A. B. Emmons, of Boston, "preventive medicine as supplied to obstetrics, *i.e.*, the utilisation of every known means to keep the prospective mother well and strong, to foresee and forestall dangers, to intelligently provide for confinement. This may be merely proper care in the home at a minimum expense for the normal case or the best skill available in a hospital for averting tragedy. Preventive obstetrics thus includes a wide knowledge of the anatomy, physiology, psychology, and sociology of the patient."

Prenatal care implies the supervision of an obstetrician, either in connection or not with a dispensary, with whom is working a well-trained nurse, with special training in district, prenatal, and social service work. As early in pregnancy as possible the patient should have a thorough examination by the physician, when he obtains her history, the history of previous pregnancies, her present symptoms. He examines the urine, makes a physical examination, noting specially the bones of the pelvis. The patient is then put in charge of the prenatal nurse, who reports to the doctor, when necessary. (In the United Kingdom, if a midwife is engaged to attend the confinement, she would probably, under the doctor, supervise the prenatal care of the patient.)

When the nurse makes her first visit she takes a social survey of the patient in her surroundings, gives instructions as to personal hygiene, in diet, bathing, clothing, fresh air, sleep, exercise, how to conserve her strength for the good of the baby and for the strain of labour and nursing. Later the preparations for the coming of the baby are made. The mental and physical condition of the mother is noted, a test of the urine made, and the co-operation of the whole family solicited. The nurse should impress on the mother the necessity and importance of maternal nursing. In her social survey the nurse should ascertain if the patient has the means for procuring proper food in sufficient quantities and is free from anxiety. If not, she studies out what is best to be done, and puts in motion the proper machinery for securing the relief needed. In keeping track of the mother, the nurse should visit her once in ten days, or oftener if indicated.

Mrs. Max West, of the Federal Children's Bureau, Washington, D.C., who is doing so much in this line of welfare work, states that prenatal care, systematically and intelligently carried on, will result:—

1. In healthier babies, of somewhat increased weight.
2. In lowering the infant mortality rate.
3. In reducing the number of stillbirths.

4. In reducing the number of miscarriages.
5. In reducing the number of premature births.
6. In a greater proportion of normal deliveries.
7. In reducing the number of cases of eclampsia and toxæmia.
8. In greatly improving the possibilities for maternal nursing.
9. In increased health for the mother.
10. In improving birth registration.
11. In helping the study of social and civic problems.
12. And in bringing greater comfort and peace of mind to harassed and overburdened mothers, thereby increasing the sum total of human happiness to an appreciable degree.

It must also be remembered that the effect is cumulative. To take a mother through her pregnancy and labour without mishap, to give her a healthy baby whom she feeds at her own breast, is to increase manifold the chances of a happy home. Such a woman will be a better wife and a better mother, all future children of such a mother will have a better start in life, and the sum total of good resulting is enormous. It is necessary to contrast such a case with the misery and wretchedness which pregnancy and childbirth among the very poor only too often mean, to realise the full value of prenatal care.

In this most important branch of visiting nurse work, the responsibility of the nurse is great. She is the one who keeps in touch with the mother, and on her faithfulness may depend the life and happiness of mother and babe.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PURE MILK.

One of the first essentials for the health of the community—and especially for sick children and motherless and artificially fed babies—is a pure milk supply. Yet this is most difficult to secure. Miss J. Cameron Macmillan, Inspector of Midwives at Oxford, says, in an admirable little book, published by Mr. Henry Frowde and Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, that milk ought to be got at least twice in the day, and, if possible, it should be taken from the milk-man in bottles, as there is less exposure by this method. When the cork is taken out of the bottle, a small cup, or egg cup, should be kept over the mouth to prevent dust, flies, &c., getting into the milk. The bottle containing it should be kept standing in a basin or dish of cold water. Where the milk is taken in the ordinary way, a smooth enamelled jug should be kept for the baby's milk. To prevent the milk being jumbled unnecessarily, the milk-man should be asked to put the milk directly into this jug. It should at once be covered by a small enamelled plate. . . . The best keeping-place is not, as a rule, the kitchen; and in small houses, it may be necessary to move the milk from one room to another. The difficulty usually arises in summer time, when the sun may stream in and make the room very hot for a certain part of the day.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)