

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

MENTION SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL DISORDERS OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM, AND THE DUTIES OF THE NURSE IN REGARD TO THEM.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Mary D. Hunter, Section Hospital, Kineton, near Warwick.

PRIZE PAPER.

There are so many nervous disorders that perhaps the easiest method of mentioning some of the principal ones would be to classify them under three headings, *i.e.* :—

1. Disorders of the brain (organic), such as hemiplegia, meningitis, or tumours of the brain.

2. Disorders of the spinal cord, such as *tabes dorsalis*, anterior poliomyelitis, scoliosis.

3. Disorders of the nerves (functional), such as epilepsy, chorea, hysteria, and neurasthenia.

The duties of the nurse in regard to them varies considerably in the different diseases. But in any case the first thing for her to consider is the cause (and if any organic disease is present), and what steps the physician is taking to remove it or ameliorate. So much help can be given by careful and intelligent nursing in these cases. Suggestion plays a very important part in the nursing of all nervous disorders, and it is absolutely essential that the nurse inspires confidence in her patient.

To enumerate the nurse's duties more fully and draw attention to the various methods, I should like to briefly mention a few in connection with the disorders I have chosen as examples.

1—DISORDERS OF BRAIN.

Hemiplegia and Meningitis.—Guard against bedsores in both diseases, and give great attention to the bowels. Care must be taken that the diet is easily digested and nourishing. Pain is best relieved by cold applications to the head. In the former the nurse should try by careful treatment to prevent fixation of joints and faulty position of limbs.

Cerebral Tumour.—The intense headache being one of the symptoms, care is needed in choosing a suitable place for the bed: in the darkest corner, so that the light does not irritate the eyes. Absolute quiet is essential for all brain disorders, and the nurse would, of course, avoid any sudden noise, such as the banging of a door.

2—DISORDERS OF SPINAL CORD.

Tabes Dorsalis.—"Lightning pains," one of the many distressing symptoms, may be relieved by hot fomentations, massage, or

counter-irritants of some kind. Suitable exercises to correct ataxia need to be practised daily. Constipation is frequently present, so that the question of aperients proves a troublesome detail. The nurse should impress upon the patient the importance of micturition at frequent and regular intervals, as disorders of the bladder generally arise to complicate matters. Between the attacks or crises, feeding up is required to make up for the loss of strength. In fact, to insist on a quiet, regular, abstemious life is the duty of the nurse in regard to this disease.

Anterior Poliomyelitis.—The most essential matter is *warmth*, which is best obtained by baths, suitable clothing, and gentle rubbings. See that the child has complete rest in a comfortable position, careful feeding, and that the bowels are kept regular.

Scoliosis.—Really more a deformity of growth than a disease, and to correct this deformity great attention must be paid to the clothing. Suitable exercise and correct breathing are also duties for the nurse to consider.

3—DISORDERS OF NERVES.

Epilepsy.—It is necessary to improve the general health by regular hours, suitable exercise and occupation, and most careful diet.

Chorea.—Absolute quiet and isolation should be insisted upon—rest being so important—combined with light food. The greatest care is needed in restraining the child, as too much restraint may do more harm than good. The sides of the bed will need padding. Proper nursing eliminates bed-sores. As arsenic is the drug usually given, the nurse must be well acquainted with the signs of an overdose.

Hysteria.—The duty of the nurse is to gain the patient's confidence and make use of judicious suggestion. Weir-Mitchell treatment is often most successful. Not too much fuss must be made, but the fact that it is a definite disease must not be lost sight of, and the nurse should refrain from showing any impatience.

Neurasthenia.—Due to some shock or worry and consequent mental strain, and therefore tact and sympathy are required in dealing with these cases. The nurse's chief duty is to ensure *rest*. There is usually loss of weight, so that diet must be considered to help improve the general health. A marked feature is insomnia, which requires great ingenuity on the part of the nurse to find out the best means of inducing sleep.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention :—Miss Catherine Wright, Miss Alice M. Burns, Miss P. Thomson, Miss J. Robinson.

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