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## EDITORIAL.

### SHORTER HOURS FOR NURSES.

An interesting Conference convened by the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, "to consider the desirability of a Reduction in the Working Hours of Nurses during their training in hospitals," was held on Tuesday, February 18th, in the Board Room of the Girls' Friendly Society at 39, Victoria Street, S.W. Mrs. Ogilvie Gordon, President of the Council, was in the chair, and Dr. H. O. Crouch opened the discussion in a sympathetic speech.

Dr. Crouch began by detailing his experience as a House Officer after leaving St. Thomas' Hospital, first at the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, in Hanover Square, where "the nurses were never off duty, for they slept in the wards," and then at the Samaritan Free Hospital, where special nurses were on duty for 48 hours on end without removing their clothes.

Fatigue generated a chemical poison; up to a certain point the organs excreted this, later you got the condition of over-fatigue, and the various ills arising from it.

Fatigue was not only physical; the ordinary nurse was imperfectly educated, and the intellectual strain upon her during training was therefore very great. Then, she might fear she was doing things badly, and so the third factor in the trinity, the emotional strain, was added also.

Conditions should be such that nursing students should sleep soundly and get up in the morning feeling extremely fit. As learners they were potential workers, and unless you looked after them during their training, you would not get good nurses.

Dr. Crouch pointed out that medical students did not work to the extent of extreme fatigue, and nurses were the sisters of medical men, not menials. It was sometimes urged that the present was an inopportune moment to speak of shorter hours, when there was such

a shortage of candidates for the nursing profession. He contended, on the contrary, that times should be so arranged that there would be leisure for recreation and education, which would tend to attract desirable candidates.

Major-General Cuthbert S. Wallace, C.B., C.M.G., who followed, considered that the present time was opportune to discuss other matters besides an eight hours' day. He reminded the audience that in an ordinary hospital there were three principal departments—the lay body which held the money bags, and on the one side the doctors, and the other the nurses. It was a pity they should be separated. Doctors and nurses had got to work together.

When discussion was invited, Miss M. Heather-Bigg advocated an eight hours' day, and showed how this could be arranged. Others who took part were Miss Marquardt (Matron of Camberwell Infirmary), Miss Brodie-Hall, P.L.G., Lady Emmott, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, Miss Tice, Miss A. C. Gibson, Miss R. Cox-Davies, and others.

The President suggested that a Committee should be appointed to inquire into the conditions of health and payment of nurses, and to report further. This was agreed. It was further agreed to invite representatives from the Royal British Nurses' Association, the College of Nursing, Ltd., the Poor Law Matrons' Association, and the British Medical Association, as well as members of the Executive of the National Council of Women, to form the Committee.

The question of overstrain from fatigue is one of vital interest to nurses. It will be remembered what interest was aroused at the meeting of the International Council of Nurses at Cologne in 1912 by the paper presented by Dr. Hecker on "The Overstrain of Nurses," and his insistence on the fact that while fatigue is physiological, over-fatigue is pathological.

The following resolution was carried unanimously at the conclusion of the session, and

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)