

Royal British Nurses' Association.

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THIS SUPPLEMENT BEING THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE CORPORATION

CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF TRAINED NURSES IN PUBLIC HEALTH WORK.

THE FUTURE PARENTS OF THE RACE.

A Conference was held at 10, Orchard Street on the 1st inst., when Miss Mallon, Tuberculosis Health Visitor for West Ham, read a paper on the above subject. Miss Alderman, in her opening remarks from the chair, spoke of the wide area which preventive work covers, stating that it commences with ante-natal care and passes on to Infant Welfare Work, and to the care of School Children; filtering through each successive stage we have the problem of tuberculosis—a much greater problem than many people realise.

Miss Mallon said that she had to apologise for having been unable to complete her paper on Tuberculosis Health Visiting and, because she wished to treat fully of this subject at some later date, she had decided to take a different subject from that which had been indicated as the one on which she would speak. Since the Association of Trained Nurses in Public Health Work was formed the subjects for discussion at all its meetings had centred mainly round Infant Welfare Work. Trained nurses take it for granted that this is as it ought to be. Our national existence depends—never more than at the present day—upon this very important question; but, to whatever state of perfection you may raise your Infant Welfare Centres, such matters as guiding and advising the mothers in the Centre and in the home and on all the numerous side issues which arise to be considered by them, are those which bear the most important fruit. You must remember that it is difficult to produce a healthy citizen from diseased parents, and therefore I would like to return to a point raised by Miss Alderman at a previous Conference when she stated that it is in the school that the questions of guidance and education in matters relating to hygiene should be given. It is not after a boy or girl has left school that he or she should learn of the conditions that lead to disease and how to guard against such dangers. The school is the place for such education, and any other later system of imparting this knowledge, which is absolutely necessary, can only be termed patchwork.

I would advocate that there should be a trained nurse for each school to undertake such teaching, and I suggest examinations in hygiene as a matter of routine with those in other educational subjects. We, as Trained Nurses and Public Health Workers, must fully realise that, until the public is educated, and enlightened on this question, we are handicapped and cannot possibly secure the best results. When we come on the scene it is too late.

I do not mean to suggest that Public Health workers are unnecessary. My point is this—educate the future parents of the race in hygiene. Let the education come systematically like any other subject in the school. Then, when we are called upon in our different capacities as Public Health Workers to deal with and advise the parent or other member of the family, as the case may be, we shall find them more receptive. You as an Infant Welfare worker find at the present time that when the child has gone from your supervision as a healthy individual, or as healthy as is possible under the circumstances, it enters the school when the time comes, to be instructed in its turn as its parents were before it. As the case now stands, what happens? From the time when you lose touch with the mother or child, there is a blank, in many cases until the Tuberculosis Nurse enters the home. This should not be. Could children from entering on their school life be kept informed in matters relating to their bodily health and the disease traps surrounding them, there would be less need for the Tuberculosis Visitor.

Of what good is all the literature which I, as a T.B. Nurse, carry to the home of the consumptive? There is not one item of my instructions which could not easily have been taught to the parent as a child, and I maintain knowledge gradually imparted as the child advances in years would certainly sink deeper than printed instructions left and advice given, often to an ailing and worried mother by what she terms a interfering official. Can you not see in the teaching given by a School Nurse that which carried out might prove far more effective than any series of visits from a T.B. Nurse later?

I heard a remark made here during a discussion to this effect: "It is so difficult to get in touch with mothers in the first months of pregnancy." Why not throw professional etiquette to the winds and enlist the aid of the School Nurse and T.B.

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