

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

PRESIDENT—MRS. OGILVIE GORDON, D.Sc., Ph.D.

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF NURSES.

This Committee was appointed at a Conference which was called by the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland and was held on February 18th, 1919. Delegates were sent from all the various Nursing Societies affiliated to the National Council, and the Conference was therefore fully representative of the various Nursing interests. Others were chosen by the National Council.

The Medical aspect of the question was explained by Major-General Sir C. Wallace, C.B., K.C.M.G., Senior Surgeon to St. Thomas' Hospital, and Dr. Crouch (Ascot).

The Chairman, Mrs. Ogilvie Gordon, in her opening remarks, referred to the reconstruction that was taking place in the relation of the worker to the working conditions, and said that the National Council was anxious to have the question of the economic position of the nursing students ventilated, as that section of professional working women had somewhat lagged behind on the road to progress being travelled by others.

A large number of the delegates took part in the discussion which followed, and it was eventually proposed by Miss Cox Davies (representing the College of Nursing, Ltd.), and seconded by Miss Barton (Chelsea Infirmary) "That a Committee be appointed for the purpose of enquiring into the conditions of work and payment of Nurses, and that it report to a further Conference."

This was carried unanimously.

The Committee as finally appointed consisted of the following members:—

A.—REPRESENTATIVE.

Mrs. Ogilvie Gordon (Chairman) and Hon. Mrs. Franklin, Executive N.C. of Women.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, Miss M. Heather Bigg, and Miss Wilson, Royal British Nurses' Association.

Miss Copeman and Miss Alsop, Poor Law Infirmary Matrons' Association.

Mr. E. B. Turner, F.R.C.S., and Mr. N. Bishop Harman, F.R.C.S., British Medical Association.

Miss Villiers, Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland.

Miss Macdonald, Asylum Workers' Association.

B.—CO-OPTED.

Dr. Jane Walker, Miss Bickerton (Hospital Matron), Dr. Crouch, Mrs. Massingberd Mundy (Hon. Secretary).

It will be noticed that the College of Nursing is not represented on the Committee, which is much to be regretted.

At the first meeting of the Committee it was decided to draw up a Questionnaire to be sent out to the various hospitals, and a sub-committee was

appointed to draft this. The provisional Questionnaire was then considered by the full Committee, and, with various alterations, was adopted, and the Secretary was instructed to send it out to certain hospitals in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. The number of separate institutions to which it was sent was 580.

Replies were received from 176 hospitals; a number in excess of what was expected as, firstly, the list of questions was in itself formidable, demanding a very considerable amount of work on the part of the Matrons (exceedingly busy women), and secondly, because a section of the Nursing Press and individuals started a campaign urging Matrons not to answer the Questionnaire both on account of its "inquisitorial" character, and because the College of Nursing had already sent out their Questionnaire, which it was alleged was better adapted for the purpose. Nevertheless, the very large number of answers indicated was received, and it is believed that the Report, with its analysed returns, will prove the necessity for the thorough inquiry, and will be of real assistance to all Hospital authorities who are anxious to bring their nursing arrangements up to modern requirements.

The Committee take this opportunity of expressing their grateful thanks to the very large number of Matrons who have replied. Each reply must represent many hours of work, involving calculation and reference to other people, and the Committee have been much struck by the full way in which the papers were filled up.

The Committee fully recognise that under no scheme of training must the main principle of the Medical and Nursing Professions be tampered with, viz., that Doctors and Nurses exist for the benefit of the public, and that the interests of the patients must be their first consideration. They can, however, feel no doubt that under the present system of training at nearly all hospitals, an alarming percentage of Nursing Students are disabled, and of those who complete their training an even higher percentage contract permanent physical troubles, with the result that a large number of women are left with decreased powers of useful work, and, incidentally, with their position as potential mothers seriously prejudiced.

The Report is based on replies which have been received from 161 General Hospitals, and 15 Hospitals for Infectious Diseases. Sixty-six of the General Hospitals sending in replies have over 100 beds, and 95 have under 100 beds. All the 15 Hospitals for Infectious Diseases from which replies have been received are large hospitals with over 100 beds.

PHYSICAL WELFARE.

A consideration of the paragraphs which follow will show that at the present time the actual arrangements made for the accommodation in the widest sense, of nurses during training, for their hours of work, rest, and leisure, for their recreation and holidays, and for their initial and subsequent medical examination, are not only below the ideal, but do not reach the standard

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