

Royal British Nurses' Association.

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WAKE UP, PRIVATE NURSES!

During the past few weeks, scarcely a day has passed without some nurse drawing our attention to the present condition of private nursing practice, and every Co-operation appears to be feeling more or less the scarcity of work. The whole position of affairs is such as to indicate that unless private nurses proceed to "set their house in order," private nursing, as an independent branch of the profession, will, in the course of a few years, cease to exist. There is not the slightest use in appealing to committees to bolster it up—they cannot make "cases." The effort, to be effective, must come from the mass of the private nurses themselves, and there are evidences that they are at last beginning to realise this. The question, however, is whether the majority will do so or whether they will be content to slide along with the reflection that "*some day at some time* things will, of themselves, all come right." They won't; wrongs never are righted without effort and very often strife; indeed, there is no evolution without the latter. Dangers such as those which threaten the private nurses cannot be averted, without organisation, co-operation, comradeship, courage and initiative on the part of those concerned. *Together*, they must face the question as to what are the direct causes of the "depression," if one may so express it, in private nursing work; and that there is *less* work to be done is not one of them. Of course, one factor in causing the general "slackness" lies in the increased cost of living and consequent rise in the fees charged by nurses, while the effect of adding an additional member to the household becomes a serious matter in many families. Then there is the fact that large numbers of nurses, recently demobilised, have joined the ranks of private nurses, either permanently or for a time. Again we have to remember that, while fully trained nurses were doing their duty to their country during the years of war, many half-trained people, not eligible as Army nurses, have got themselves firmly seated in the saddle by building up their connection at a time when there was a very great scarcity of nurses. But there are still more serious conditions which might be remedied if only the nurses would cease to move about in a walking sleep,

and if they would realise to the full extent how their hardly won qualifications are being undermined. In the first place, one has only to look around to find the general tendency to open up many branches of work, which the nurses are better qualified to undertake than any others, to all classes of partially trained people. Only last week *THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING* drew the attention of nurses to the fact that a member of the Council of the College of Nursing was advocating the employment of V.A.D.s for work connected with combating venereal disease. We see the Red Cross Society offering them what it regards as the necessary training for public health work, and this raises the contention that it is impossible for the Chairman of the College, who is also Chairman of the Red Cross Society, to serve *impartially* the interests of both trained nurses and V.A.D.s. Again, we know that a course of training in health work is to be opened up for girls of eighteen and upwards, which will qualify them as health workers and, if the nurses do not get their profession standardised, they may yet find that a three years' certificate will come to be regarded as inferior to that granted after such a course. Already, many women with less than three years' hospital training, some with no hospital training at all, hold public health appointments, and we know that many nursing homes employ nurses without certificates in general training. Some may argue that these facts do not affect the nurse doing private work in the ordinary way. They do affect her very seriously indeed, for they tend to make private nursing the overflow tank into which drift most of those who, had they not been undersold by the "half-nurses," would have found a living elsewhere, instead of coming to compete where the ranks are already sufficiently well filled.

Had the nurses' Registration Bill been permitted to pursue an uninterrupted course through the Houses of Parliament, we should have had a clear distinction between the trained and the half-trained in the eyes of the State, the Doctors and the public; and the latter would soon enough have learned to insist that nothing but the best was good enough where the health of the British people is concerned. But the nurses' employers well knew that to allow a Bill to pass which gave such measure of self-government to the nurses,

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