

## THE GENERAL NURSING COUNCIL.

The Eighth Meeting of the General Nursing Council was held on Thursday, September 23rd, at 2 p.m., at the Ministry of Health, Whitehall, S.W.

THE CHAIRMAN, MR. J. C. PRIESTLEY, K.C., presided. With three exceptions all the members were present, to whom the Chairman extended a hearty welcome after the holidays. After the minutes had been approved, adjourned business was dealt with under Correspondence.

### CORRESPONDENCE.

#### 1.—LETTER FROM THE MINISTER OF LABOUR CONCERNING NURSES' HOURS OF EMPLOYMENT.

The Chairman said the first letter was from the Minister of Labour, on which the Minister of Health invited the opinion of the Council. It dealt with the much-discussed question of the omission of nurses from the Hours of Employment Bill (which provides for a 48 hours' working week), and was referred for consideration on July 30th. This letter had been brought before a conference of the professional members on the previous day, and discussed at length, and it was desired that the Council should not proceed to express an opinion until more time had been granted for the consideration of this important matter. With the permission of the meeting he proposed to pass on to other business. This was agreed.

#### 2.—LETTER FROM MINISTER OF HEALTH. ADMISSION OF PROBATIONERS TO POOR LAW INFIRMARIES AT AN EARLIER AGE THAN 21.

The Chairman said: The next letter I read to the Council on the 30th July, in which the opinion of the Council was desired by the Minister of Health as to the age at which probationer nurses should be admitted to their studies in the Poor Law Infirmaries. The question was whether they should be admitted at an earlier age than 21. I dealt with the points for and against. I do not think I need repeat them. It is pointed out that there are moral dangers in admitting young girls into hospitals at too young an age. They normally leave school at 17 or 18, if not earlier, and their parents cannot afford to keep them until they are 21. We propose to admit trained nurses upon the Register at 21. Perhaps you will consider the matter now so that we may reply, if it is your pleasure to do so.

Miss Sparshott said the matter had been considered at Manchester (Royal Infirmary), and they were going to admit probationers at 19. They would be admitted to the preliminary training school at that age.

Miss MacCullum asked if the age at which probationers should enter hospitals did not depend very largely on the number of hours they would be expected to work? A girl of 19 should not be asked to work 12 or more hours a day.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick said she was in favour of lowering the age, and proposed a resolution "that the Council recommend that the age be 19

at which probationers might be admitted for training at Poor Law Infirmaries." She said that the pick of women workers who might be available for nursing had in many instances already entered other professions and occupations at 21. Mrs. Fenwick also desired to disabuse the minds of those present that girls were specially subjected to moral dangers in hospitals. The reverse she believed to be the case. Probationers were specially well guarded in the training schools.

Miss Macdonald seconded the resolution. She said that in her work she had studied the psychology and hygiene of adolescence, and she considered that proof had been given during the war that girls of 19 were as suitable to undergo training as they were a few years later.

Miss Dowbiggin spoke in favour of the resolution. Probationers were admitted at 19 at the hospital of which she was matron, and in her experience girls were more receptive at 19, soon after leaving school, and learned more readily.

Mr. Christian said that if the resolution went forward there ought to be a stipulation as to how many hours the probationers should work. He did not think they ought to continue to work the number of hours which they did at present in public institutions. He did not think 19 could be accepted as the age in connection with mental nurses; it was a different class of work altogether.

Sir Jenner Verrall supported the resolution.

Dr. Goodall said he understood that the resolution only applied to Poor Law Infirmaries, as they were already admitted at that age in Fever Hospitals, after which many went in for general hospital training.

Mrs. Fenwick said the letter which they were discussing asked for a definite opinion on the age of probationers to be admitted to Poor Law Infirmaries, over which the Minister of Health had jurisdiction. Her resolution did not refer to any other type of hospital. She did not wish to incorporate an amendment on the hours of work, as it was not the point on which they were invited to express an opinion.

Miss Seymour Yapp said the Ashton Board of Guardians had asked the sanction of the Minister of Health to admit girls for training at the age of 18. As matron she preferred 19.

Mr. Christian then moved "that in allowing Infirmaries to take probationers at 19 the Council was of opinion that they should not work for more than 96 hours a fortnight."

Miss MacCallum seconded the amendment.

Miss Macdonald asked: "Are we to discuss the letter from the Minister of Labour dealing with hours of work at the next meeting of the Council?"

The Chairman replied: "We hope so. Perhaps we shall have another conference. We will then bring it up at the next meeting."

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Dr. Bedford Pierce said he hoped it would be made clear to the Press that in voting on the amendment the Council was not expressing an

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