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EDITORIAL.

**ALTERATION OF THE LUNACY LAWS
ADVOCATED.**

The representative Conference on Lunacy Administration, convened by the Chairman of the Board of Control (Sir Frederick Willis), which concluded its deliberations on Saturday last, arrived at some very important conclusions. The opening Address was given by the Minister of Health, who impressed upon the Conference that the chance of obtaining the legislation desired for the alteration of the law, so as to permit of the treatment of early cases without certification, would be very much increased if there were unanimity on this point. It is certain, from the constitution of the Conference, that its conclusions must have weight, for it included practically the whole of the Medical Superintendents and Chairmen of Visiting Committees of County and Borough Mental Hospitals in England and Wales, the Medical Superintendents, and Chairmen of Managing Committees, of registered mental hospitals, and the Superintendents of some of the licensed houses.

After full discussion, the Conference arrived at the following unanimous conclusions:—

1. That early treatment without certification should be legalised.
2. That by early treatment very many cases would be prevented from suffering permanently from mental breakdown.
3. That such early treatment should only be given in institutions or homes approved for the purpose by some Government department.
4. That the Government department upon whom the duty of supervising this work should be placed should be the Board of Control.

It was also unanimously agreed that the law should be altered in order to allow of the reception of voluntary boarders in public mental hospitals, and that local authorities should be empowered to contribute towards the expense of early treatment when it was carried out by someone other than themselves.

It was considered that the responsible authorities should be left free to make the best arrangements possible in any area as to where facilities for early treatment should be provided, whether in a general hospital, a public mental hospital, or an approved home.

An important pronouncement in regard to the nursing arrangements in mental hospitals was made, which, if carried into effect, cannot fail to be beneficial to the nursing of the patients in such hospitals, *i.e.*, that the Matron, and those nurses who occupy the more important posts, should have had not only special training in the nursing of mental diseases, but a full course of training in a general hospital. Patients suffering from mental diseases are liable—in some cases peculiarly liable—to contract physical diseases also, thus the brittleness of their bones, which fracture easily, and their tendency to contract tuberculosis are well known. The more it is realised that a patient cannot be nursed in sections, but that his whole personality must be considered, the better will be the standard of nursing. Further, some knowledge of the nursing of mental cases, whether they intend to specialise in this branch or not, would be of great use to general nurses, and mental nurses will be the more proficient for experience in the care of patients who are not mentally unsound. The demand for nurses (we hope Registered Nurses) holding the double qualification for the higher posts in mental hospitals should have the effect of stimulating members of the profession to obtain this knowledge.

Other points approved by the Conference were the importance of research and pathological work, the appointment of women on all Visiting Committees, the provision of lay staffs to relieve the Medical Superintendents of the work connected with the business side of mental hospital administration, and the improvement of the position of Assistant Medical Officers in Mental Hospitals.

We hope that the recommendations will be incorporated in a Government Bill, and speedily passed into law.

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