

## OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

### DETAIL THE NURSING, INCLUDING THE DIET, OF A PATIENT SUFFERING FROM FAILING HEART, WITH GENERAL OEDEMA.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss M. Cullen, West London Hospital, Hammersmith, W.6.

#### PRIZE PAPER.

In a case of valvular disease the main points consist chiefly in treatment by (1) rest, (2) diet.

Rest is essential if failing compensation is present. Tonics may be ordered, chief of these being digitalis; this slows the heart's action, also acts as a diuretic, helping to relieve the dropsy which shows itself in the later stages of the disease. While this drug is given the patient must be carefully watched, in case the pulse becomes irregular or the urine tends to show a decrease in amount passed. Strychnine is another valuable drug if compensation has broken down. Strophanthus another, suitable for some cases.

Diet is of the utmost importance in nursing a case of heart disease. Food should be light and nourishing; nitrogenous foods limited. It is better to feed a patient with small quantities frequently than to give heavy meals. An over-distended stomach, causing much flatulence, is very distressing. Fluids are usually limited, and are best given between, not at, meal times.

When compensation has failed, only give fluids, of which milk is the most important; meat-juice and jellies are pleasant to take, and give variety. The breathing in a cardiac case may become distressed, and sometimes patient is unable to lie down; he must then be propped up with plenty of pillows, or a bed-rest, and made as comfortable as possible; a pillow should be placed under the knees and kept well in position.

It is important in these cases to keep the bowels freely opened; the amount of urine passed should be recorded, and the skin induced to act. These details tend towards relieving the dropsy and fluid present in the tissues. Fluid, when present in large quantities, will have to be removed, either from the abdomen, lower limbs, or chest; when this has been commenced, it will be necessary to repeat at short intervals, as it so quickly accumulates again. For the removal of fluid from the abdomen, a trocar and cannula will be required. For the lower limbs, Southey's tubes are best; these can be left in position, and the fluid drained into a

basin, if patient is comfortable sitting out on a chair.

The important fact about nursing a patient with heart disease is to make him as comfortable as possible, with as many pillows as best suit; the patient will find his own position. All unnecessary fatigue must be avoided which throws any strain on the heart; all excitement and worry. He must not be allowed to do anything for himself.

In an advanced case alcohol is sometimes necessary. Brandy most valuable, especially should the pulse become weaker or patient feel faint. Brandy and egg mixture is pleasant to take. Cinnamon water added to flavour. Dose given: ʒi to ʒii at a time.

Oxygen may be ordered where there is much breathlessness or cyanosis; it should be given for 15 minutes hourly, or oftener should the doctor order it. Nitrate of amyl capsules should be at hand; these give great relief in cases of angina pectoris.

Venesection is sometimes performed; this helps to lower the blood-pressure. The mouth needs careful attention, frequent swabbing with glycerine and borax, or lemon and mouth-washes, unless patient is too ill to perform this; then it must be done for him.

Guard against bed-sores. If necessary an air-ring or water-bed should be used, as these patients are often restless, and their condition calls for good nursing and watchfulness as to prevention, which is better than cure.

Bed-clothes should be light but warm, and if clothes are too heavy, then a cradle placed over a blanket or sheet gives great relief; only one must see that the patient is not cold, and protect the feet with bed-socks or bottles. Absolute quiet must be maintained, and amount of sleep recorded. It is sometimes necessary to give drugs for this purpose. Paraldehyde, morphia, or heroin are useful.

Should sickness be troublesome, bismuth sometimes gives relief, and sips of hot water. As the disease becomes more advanced, the liver may become enlarged, and lungs become oedematous, symptoms being dyspepsia and cough. These all need treatment in various ways.

#### HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss M. Ramsey, S.R.N., Miss Lena M. Innes, Miss P. Thomson.

#### QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

Describe methods which you have been taught to practise for the care and prevention of tuberculosis.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)