

## THE SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON THE GENERAL NURSING COUNCIL.

### REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE.

We print below the Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the General Nursing Council.

THE SELECT COMMITTEE appointed to consider the rules of the General Nursing Council with regard to the prescribed training for nurses and the reservation of seats on the Council for matrons have agreed to the following Report:—

#### INTRODUCTION.

1. Your Committee have held seven meetings and examined 15 witnesses, among whom are included representatives from the Ministry of Health, the General Nursing Council, the College of Nursing, the Royal British Nurses' Association, the Professional Union of Trained Nurses, the Registered Nurses' Parliamentary Council, matrons of certain types of small hospitals, sister tutors, and other ladies who, though not now actually engaged in nursing, have had very considerable experience in nursing problems.

2. Under the Nurses' Registration Act, 1919, a General Nursing Council for England and Wales was established to consist of 25 members, partly nominated and partly elected. Upon this Council the Act imposes certain defined educational and disciplinary duties in relation to the maintenance and upkeep of a register of nurses. The matters referred to your Committee arise out of proposals which must, under the provisions of the Act, be submitted by the Council for the approval of the Minister of Health, and the sanction of Parliament.

3. Your Committee interpret their Order of Reference to cover three questions:—

(i) Whether the rules proposed by the General Nursing Council in regard to the prescribed training for nurses, in fact comply with the provisions of the Act?

(ii) What is the best method of securing that a proper and adequate training shall be obtained by all nurses applying for registration?

(iii) What is the best scheme of election that can be prescribed under the provisions of the schedule to the Act?

Although for the sake of clarity Your Committee propose to deal with these three questions separately, they desire at the outset to emphasize the fact that in reality there is one major problem before them which is, in essence, educational, though no doubt other important issues of public policy are involved.

#### THE PROVISIONS OF THE ACT WITH REGARD TO TRAINING.

4. Section 3 of the Act provides under sub-section (1) (c) that the Council shall make rules "for regulating the conduct of any examinations which may be prescribed as a condition of admission to the register." Under sub-section (2) (a) and (b) that rules made under Section 3 shall contain provisions requiring that (a) candidates for admission to the register "shall have undergone the prescribed training and shall possess the prescribed experience in the nursing of the sick," and (b) "the prescribed training shall be carried out . . . in an institution approved by the Council . . ."

5. Your Committee are informed that the word "prescribed" when used in statutes relating to a rule-making authority means "prescribed by rule." Clearly, therefore,

the wording of the Act lays an obligation upon the Council to make rules in relation to four matters:—

- (i) The conduct of the examination,
- (ii) The training,
- (iii) The experience,
- (iv) The place of training of candidates for admission to the register.

6. In order to comply with these provisions the Council have submitted for sanction the following proposals:—

(i) An examination syllabus (including a "Nurses' Chart") setting out in some detail the subjects in which candidates are to be examined. This syllabus is submitted as a schedule to the Rules and it is important to note that thereby it becomes compulsory; and

(ii) Certain Rules (Rules with regard to Admission to Register by Examination). Those immediately pertinent to Your Committee's inquiry are—Rule (1) setting out the types of training schools which may be approved by the Council and stating that the Council shall direct what proportion of the period of training shall be spent in schools other than complete training schools. Rules (4) and (6) which state that the applicant must furnish certain certificates signed by responsible officers of her training institution. In regard to the preliminary examination, it must be certified "that she has completed one year of training and that she has attended a course of lectures in the subjects prescribed for the Preliminary Examination in the Syllabus of Subjects for Examination, and has undergone practical instruction in the wards in the subjects therein prescribed for that Examination." In regard to the final examination, a certificate is required that she has completed a course of training, the length of which is specified in accordance with the type of training school she has been through, and that "she has undergone systematic instruction in each of the subjects prescribed in the Syllabus of Subjects for Examination contained in the Schedule to this part of the Rules as being necessary for admission to the Part of the Register to which she applies to be admitted." And Rule (7) which lays down that for the purpose of these Rules, "Training in a Training School" means training given at the School in the subjects prescribed by the Council as the subjects for the examination which an applicant seeks to pass."

7. Thus the training prescribed by these rules involves a period of time spent in an institution, the training facilities of which have been approved by the Council, and the production of certificates that during this time the candidate has undergone systematic instruction in the subjects prescribed by the Council as subjects for the examination which are the subjects set out in the compulsory examination syllabus.

8. It has been held by the legal adviser to the Ministry of Health (a barrister) that the rules as drawn do, in fact, comply with the provisions of Section 3 of the Act, and that the wording of the Act does not necessarily mean that the Council were bound to embody in these rules all the details of the way in which the actual training should be carried out.

9. On the other hand, it is argued by several witnesses that the words "prescribed training" mean that the Council shall issue rules laying down in detail the exact course of training through which each candidate must pass. This would involve the prescription of the lectures to be given, the standard of proficiency to be obtained and the method to be adopted in teaching. It is contended that the Council is compelled to prescribe an examination under Section 3 (1) (c) and to approve training institutions under 3 (2) (b) and that under 3 (2) (c) it must prescribe, as well, a scheme of training to be carried out in the approved institutions. That, in fact, by the Rules as drawn it has

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