

APPOINTMENTS.

MATRONS.

Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, Norwich.—Mrs. E. O. Jackson, has been appointed Matron. She was trained at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London, where she subsequently held the positions of Ward Sister, Assistant Matron, and Sister Housekeeper. She has recently held the position of Matron at St. Peter's Hospital, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, and is a certified Midwife.

Convalescent Home, Woodhouses Eaves, near Loughborough.—Miss J. Mary Verity, S.R.N., has been appointed Matron. She was trained at the Royal Infirmary, Bradford, and has held the position of Sister at the East Suffolk Hospital, Ipswich, and of Night Superintendent at the Royal Infirmary, Bradford.

LEGACIES TO NURSES.

Miss Marianne Coats of St. Leonards-on-Sea left £100 and the income from her London, Midland and Scottish Railway shares to her faithful nurse, Miss Margaret Fogarty.

Mr. Richard Wyndham Vaughan of Southbourne-on-Sea, left £50 to his nurse, Miss M. Morgan.

Miss Mary June Barnes of Southport, left £500 to her nurse companion, Miss Flora MacNay.

Mr. Walter F. Bootes of Luton left his nurse, Miss Bessie Cook, £50.

AN AWFUL TRAGEDY.

Both the public conscience, and that of Nurses and Midwives, has been horrified by the succession of maternal deaths (eight in all in the course of six months) from puerperal septicæmia, following childbirth, in the Nursing Home of the Kingston Nursing Association, or of patients who had been attended by the Association's Nurses. The Coroner, Dr. M. H. Taylor, who investigated the cases, stated that they had followed each other in such a way that there was no doubt that the infection was carried to the patients by the same nurse. Evidence was given at his enquiry by Miss Trotter, Matron of the Home, and Miss Mary Watson, a midwife in its employ.

Eventually the Home was closed, and an enquiry held by the Minister of Health.

The following letter has now been addressed by the Minister of Health to Mrs. J. P. Waters, the Chairman of the Committee of the Association:—

Ministry of Health,
Whitehall, S.W. 1.

July 2nd, 1926.

MADAM,—I am directed by the Minister of Health to inform you that he has had under consideration the report made by a Medical Officer of this Department on her enquiry into certain cases of septic infection which have occurred recently among patients attended by nurses on the staff of the Kingston District Nursing Association either as midwives or as maternity nurses. The Minister has learned with great concern of this outbreak of infection which has unfortunately had fatal consequences in a number of cases, and he desires to express his sympathy with the relatives and friends of those who lost their lives.

The Minister recognises that the Committee of the Association, in organising the midwifery work carried out by the Association, appreciated the importance of securing a high standard of practice and endeavoured to secure this by appointing fully-trained nurses as midwives on their staff. The unfortunate events of the past few months cannot be ascribed to want of competence or diligence on their part, but they reveal clearly that some members of the staff have proved both incompetent and negligent.

The facts elicited by the enquiry indicate that there was grave laxity on the part of the Superintendent in the administration of the Maternity Home and of the extern midwifery practice. She apparently failed to realise the risk of permitting the same nurse to have access to infected and non-infected patients, and she even allowed a nurse who was herself suffering from septic infection to remain on duty in spite of her manifest unfitness to continue to attend maternity patients. There can be little doubt that this nurse acted as a carrier of virulent infection from one patient to another and, although the ultimate responsibility for permitting this must devolve upon the Superintendent, the nurse

herself, in view of her training and experience, should have been fully aware of the danger to which her patients were thus exposed and cannot be exonerated from blame.

It is only fair to the Superintendent to add that she suspected the presence of infection in a patient attended by the nurse in question in the capacity of maternity nurse, although the medical practitioner in charge of the case appears to have failed to diagnose the condition or to recognise the patient as a source of infection. Whatever the precise cause of this infection may have been, it seems likely that at least some of the subsequent cases would not have occurred had adequate and immediate precautions been taken.

The Minister considers that no useful purpose would be served by reviewing in detail incidents which occurred in the course of this outbreak and which appear to be open to criticism, but he is compelled with great reluctance to recognise that members of a trained and well-qualified staff have failed in their duty to their Committee, to their patients, and to their profession, and that their negligence has contributed in large measure to the calamities which were the occasion of this enquiry. Moreover, he cannot escape the impression that the medical care of more than one of the cases which were investigated does not seem, as far as the evidence shows, to have been in accordance with the principles of sound midwifery practice.

It is understood that the Maternity Home has been closed temporarily and that the district midwifery practice is in abeyance for the time being. The Minister concurs in the action which has been taken and he considers that the Committee would be well advised, when maternity work is resumed, not only to replace the Superintendent and the nurse directly concerned with the recent infected cases, but in view of the laxity in administration revealed by the enquiry to appoint an entirely new midwifery staff.

The Minister fully appreciates the anxiety caused to the Association by this distressing occurrence, but he trusts that the Committee will not be unduly discouraged by what has happened. There is fortunately a long record of good and successful work to look back upon and the Minister feels sure that the valuable public service rendered by the Association will not be allowed to lapse. He suggests, however, that it might be advisable for the Committee to consider affiliation of their Association with the Surrey County Nursing Association.

The Minister would be glad to be informed when it is proposed to re-open the Maternity Home as certain alterations in accommodation and staffing would seem to be desirable.

I am, Madam,

Your obedient Servant.

(Sgd.) A. B. MACLACHLAN.

At a public meeting of subscribers to the Association held in the Town Hall, Kingston, on July 5th, at which the Mayor, Mr. G. D. Densham, presided, the report of the Ministry of Health was submitted, when the Vicar of St. Paul's, Kingston Hill, the Rev. A. Wellesley Orr, is reported to have said the Committee's duties were "administrative," and they could not be expected to be responsible for "technical matters like nursing." He thought the Ministry to blame, and that the deaths might have been avoided if the Ministry had carried out its duties of supervising the work of the Nursing Association.

Dr. Matthews, M.O.H., said the Midwives were under the supervision of the Surrey County Council.

The women members of the Committee resigned, on the ground that public confidence had been shaken. After considerable discussion, an Emergency Committee was formed to consult with the existing Committee and decide on the future of the Association.

We can well believe that some members of the Staff have proved both incompetent and negligent, but that does not, in our view, exonerate the Committee from responsibility for this awful tragedy.

We should like to know what proportion of Registered Nurses, and Certified Midwives, if any, are included in this Committee which assumes control of professional work, and therefore responsibility for it.

The lives of child-bearing mothers and their infants are a sacred trust, and their care not to be lightly undertaken by any without knowledge of the dangers incurred in so doing.

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