

NURSING IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

REPORT FROM THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON NURSING HOMES (REGISTRATION).*

It is satisfactory that the Select Committee on Nursing Homes (Registration) "appointed to consider and enquire into the question of the inspection and supervision of Nursing Homes, and to report what legislation, if any, is necessary or desirable for this purpose," has reported to Parliament "that legislation to give effect to a scheme of registration and inspection of Nursing Homes should be introduced at an early date," and, also, "that in spite of existing legislation in regard to Maternity Homes all Nursing Homes, including Maternity Homes, should be brought under one comprehensive scheme."

It is, however, much to be regretted that the Committee do not recommend that to be eligible for Registration Nursing Homes must employ State Registered Nurses. This is a measure of protection which the public who pay for skilled nursing have a right to expect, in the same way that they expect to be treated by Medical Practitioners giving the guarantee of Registration by the General Medical Council.

The Committee held 14 meetings and examined 36 witnesses, including representatives of the Ministry of Health, also medical practitioners, Matrons and Proprietors of Nursing Homes, Nurses, and members of the general public.

The Committee interpreted their Order of Reference to cover two questions, the second being contingent upon the answer given to the first.

(i) Whether the general conditions under which Nursing Homes are conducted render it advisable or necessary in the public interest, that these institutions should be liable in some degree to the supervision of a public body.

(ii) If the need for some form of supervision be shown to exist, then to what degree and in what manner should this be provided in order to be most effectively exercised.

The Committee point out that the somewhat vague term "Nursing Home" is commonly used to cover a variety of institutions differing greatly in character and type; that any institution to be properly called a Nursing Home must habitually cater for patients, and that broadly speaking it differs from a hospital in that it is carried on for purposes of profit.

Upon the evidence adduced before them the Committee are of opinion that the existence of a genuine need for the registration and supervision of Nursing Homes is fully established.

The complaints received by the Committee arise from three sources:—

(1) *Doctors*.—Mainly directed to structural and sanitary defects in the buildings used as Nursing Homes, and to the lack of proper provision and equipment in regard to surgical cases.

(2) *Nurses*.—Mainly directed to inadequate accommodation both for patients and for staff; to provision of bad and insufficient food; inadequacy, or even total absence of staff; the lack of training or absence of any qualifications among the staff; and even the undesirable habits of persons in charge. In consequence of these conditions patients may be, and often are, seriously neglected.

(3) *Patients*.—The evidence received from the patients themselves contains similar complaints to those put forward by the nurses, though necessarily as viewed from the particular standpoint of the patient.

The Committee consider that three facts clearly emerge:—
(1) That the dwelling-house converted into a Nursing Home, with its many structural deficiencies which cannot be overcome, is, at any rate in acute surgical cases, a very poor and expensive substitute for the specially built, adequately equipped and staffed, hospital.

(2) The Committee have been deeply impressed with the urgent need for registration and supervision in that class of Nursing Home which caters for the poor senile chronic. They consider that the general application of registration and inspection will do much to alleviate the bad conditions and suffering undergone to-day by patients of this class, but they desire strongly to emphasise their opinion that this change cannot be regarded as a cure for these evils, but merely as a palliative. They feel that the problem can only properly be solved by the re-organization of the Poor Law system, and with regard to the class of patient dealt with in this sub-paragraph by the provision of proper paying accommodation by local authorities to meet their needs.

(3) The Committee state that it has been made abundantly clear to them that the provision of accommodation for the nursing staff in Nursing Homes of all grades leaves very much to be desired. They feel very strongly that it is impossible for the nursing profession to give of its best unless its members are properly housed and adequately fed. Such conditions as have been described to your Committee not only re-act unfavourably upon the health of the individual nurses, but also cannot be conducive to the proper management and care of the patients. It is an unfortunate feature of this complaint that it cannot be said to be inapplicable even in the homes conducted by fully qualified persons whether belonging to the nursing or medical professions.

The Committee find that abuses do exist, and are sufficiently prevalent, particularly in the cheaper class of home, and the home catering for senile chronic cases, to render some form of supervision and inspection essential. They, therefore, recommend that legislation to give effect to this should be introduced at an early date.

Recommendations.

The Committee's recommendations are as follows:—

1. That legislation to give effect to a scheme of registration and inspection of nursing homes should be introduced at an early date.

2. That the supervising authorities should be County Councils and County Borough Councils.

3. That supervising authorities may well be empowered to delegate their powers to a Committee upon which both doctors and nurses shall have some representation.

4. That the duties of inspection shall be carried out by medical officers of health with the assistance of other technical officers.

5. That inspection shall be limited to the general suitability and organisation of the home, and shall not embrace any inquiry into the medical records or private affairs of the patients.

6. That the definition of the term "Nursing Home" shall be made wide enough to include all types of nursing homes, including maternity homes.

7. That certain publicly-controlled institutions shall be expressly excluded from the scheme.

8. That supervising authorities may exempt certain charitable organisations for defined periods of time.

9. That a nursing home shall not be exempt on the sole grounds that there is a medical practitioner resident in or in actual control of a home.

10. That appeals against the refusal or cancellation of registration may be made to a referee appointed by the Minister of Health.

11. That in spite of existing legislation in regard to maternity homes, all nursing homes, including maternity homes, shall be brought under one comprehensive scheme.

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