

THE NURSING SERVICE IN MENTAL HOSPITALS.

The Board of Control (66, Victoria Street, S.W. 1), who have had under their consideration the Report of the Departmental Committee on Nursing, together with the Report of the proceedings of the Conference, which took place in London, on April 21st last, to consider the Nursing Services in Mental Hospitals, have now, through their Chairman, Sir Frederick Willis, addressed a Circular Letter on the subject to each County and Borough Mental Hospital in England and Wales.

They point out that, at the present time, mental hospitals are finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain in the Service a sufficient number of suitable women nurses, and that it is important that this difficulty should be overcome, for, as the Committee state in their Report, an improved Nursing Service "would add materially to the well-being of the patients, and enhance the therapeutic value of the hospitals."

The Committee expressed the opinion that by raising the status of the Mental Nursing Service, and improving its amenities and remuneration, large numbers of the right type of women will adopt the service as a profession and the Board are satisfied that this opinion is well founded.

The Committee made a number of detailed recommendations. Whilst it may not be possible, at the outset, to carry out all these recommendations, the Board suggest that the following steps should now be taken, and presses the Visiting Committees to adopt them.

NOMENCLATURE.

The nomenclature proposed by the Committee for the various ranks should be adopted generally, and the staff should be graded in the following way:—

Women.—(1) Matron; (2) Assistant Matron; (3) Sister Tutor; (4) Night Sister; (5) Sister; (6) Staff Nurse; (7) Senior Probationer; and (8) Probationer.

Men.—(1) Chief Male Nurse; (2) Deputy Chief Male Nurse; (3) Night Charge Nurse; (4) Charge Nurse; (5) Staff Nurse; (6) Senior Probationer; and (7) Probationer.

QUALIFICATIONS.

The Board endorse the Departmental Committee's opinion that the posts of Matron, Assistant Matron, Sister Tutor, Night Sister, and Sisters of Sick and Admission hospital wards, should be held by persons who are certificated, or registered, in both general and mental nursing; the posts of Sisters in other wards, and of Staff Nurses, by nurses who are certificated or registered in mental nursing; and that nurses should only be recognised as Senior Probationers when they have passed the Preliminary examination.

CONCESSIONS TO EXISTING NURSES.

The Board think that, in the case of future entrants, the rules set out above should be strictly followed, but consider that some concessions may properly be made to existing nurses who have proved themselves fitted for promotion.

In considering what concessions may be made, they regard it as essential that either the Matron, or the Assistant Matron, and the Sister-Tutor, and the Sister in Charge of sick wards, should be doubly trained.

We heartily endorse the opinion of the Board that every possible encouragement should be given to existing Sisters and Staff-Nurses, certificated or registered only in mental nursing, to complete their training in general nursing, and so to qualify themselves as candidates for the more important posts.

The Board realize that the facilities for giving men general hospital training are as yet too imperfect to make it practicable to suggest the appointment of doubly trained

male nurses for the higher posts, but would like to see efforts made to induce general hospitals, under suitable arrangements, to accept men as Probationers for training in general nursing.

Other points considered desirable by the Board are that a certain percentage of future entrants should have undergone full general hospital training before entering a mental hospital; that every facility and encouragement should be given to nurses to become certificated, and, we may add, registered, in mental nursing; and that every entrant should be informed that no promotions to Staff-Nurse or any higher grade will be made unless the candidates possess this qualification. Further, as far as practicable, all Probationers should have received a good general education.

The Board consider that the practice of the nursing of male patients by women nurses should be more widely extended than at present.

They are of opinion that it will be necessary if the status of the Mental Hospital Nursing Service is to be raised, to provide that the higher posts, and especially those for which double training is necessary, should be adequately remunerated, and hope that these posts will come to be regarded as prizes in the Profession of Nursing.

The proposals of the Board of Control, if carried into effect, cannot fail to materially improve the training, and therefore the efficiency, of nurses generally.

Now that nurses can obtain admission to the general and supplementary parts of the State Register at the age of 21, a further two years can be advantageously spent in obtaining the double qualification, which will add to their efficiency whatever branch of nursing they eventually adopt.

Another point to which no reference is made in the letter of the Board of Control, but which, in our opinion, is of great importance is the position of the Matron, who should be definitely recognised as the head of the Nursing Staff, and, as such, should report, and have direct access, to the Visiting Committee.

In conclusion, we warmly congratulate the Board of Control on its decisions, believing that they are for the good of the Nursing Profession, and therefore of the sick in mind and body, and hope that by the goodwill of all concerned, and especially by the encouragement and co-operation of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, and of the Ministry of Health, the standards of nursing in the most delicate and difficult branch of mental nursing, which, nevertheless, has its great rewards for those with sympathy and understanding for the sick in mind, may be appreciably raised.

NURSING IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

March 2nd.

Nursing Homes (Registration).

In the House of Commons on March 2nd it was ordered: "That a Select Committee be appointed to consider and inquire 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."

Sir Cyril Cobb, Dr. Vernon Davies, Mr. Ernest Evans, Sir Leolin Forestier-Walker, Mr. Hurst, Major-General Sir Richard Luce, Mrs. Philipson, Major Price, Dr. Salter, Miss Wilkinson and Mr. C. H. Wilson nominated Members of the Committee.

Ordered: "That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records,"

Ordered: "That three be the quorum."—(Colonel Gibbs.)

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