

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NURSE IN THE TUBERCULOSIS CAMPAIGN.\*

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The subject of my remarks to-day is one that admits of very wide development indeed, and, in the short interval at my disposal, it will be possible to refer to but a few of the aspects which strike me as being of special importance in connection with this subject. The responsibility, of which I would speak, is one that rests not only with those engaged in the various branches of Tuberculosis or Health work, but with every qualified nurse, directly or indirectly she comes constantly into touch, in one way or another, with the great problem of combating the spread of Tuberculosis or of rendering assistance to its victims. The keynote of a paper on "The Responsibility of the Nurse in the Tuberculosis Campaign" lies I consider, in the one word Knowledge. Knowledge of Tuberculosis, of its prevalence, its causes, its symptoms, its cure, and, above all, knowledge of how infection is spread, must, of necessity, engender in every nurse worthy of the name a great sense of responsibility whenever her work brings her up against the many problems connected with the disease. Whether it be in some Institution for the treatment of tuberculous patients, or in their houses; whether it be in the schools, in the General Hospital, in the factories, perhaps, or it may be only in the train or omnibus, opportunities, with their corresponding responsibilities, continually arise for her of doing something in the great campaign against this disease, so insidious in its approach, so terrible in the havoc which it gives rise to, and so menacing as regards its influence on the coming race.

Especially great is the Nurse's responsibility in the vast field of Preventive Work; there the slightest detail assumes at once a far-reaching importance indeed; some act of negligence, a single failure to apply our knowledge, may produce effects impossible to control, may endanger the lives of many and provide still greater handicaps in the colossal task of stamping out "the great white scourge." There are, in fact, no limits to the Responsibility of the Nurse just because the knowledge she has acquired, even in the course of a training in general nursing, must of necessity have shown to her, and that very effectively, the terrible insidious characteristics of the disease in its propagation and general development; it follows that the duties and responsibilities of the nurse are diffuse in their nature and meet her everywhere along the path of her professional career. Moreover, of the nurse engaged in any branch of Tuberculosis work, or holding any Public Health appointment, a high standard of education, a real desire for knowledge, and a keen intelligence wherewith to grasp all she sees and hears, is demanded, if she is to achieve all she might in the field of Tuberculosis work. Such personal qualities, too, as tact, patience, perseverance, have often to be pushed to the utmost limit, particularly as regards the examination of contacts, and in efforts to control infection in those homes of the poor in which a patient is suffering from tuberculosis.

First, and foremost among the Responsibilities of the Nurse, in this great campaign of modern times, comes that of educating the public. The widespread ignorance of the public, on the whole subject of Tuberculosis, is one of the greatest difficulties, which those who suffer from tuber-

culous diseases and those who set out to cure them, have to combat. Indeed, without a better education on the subject of Tuberculosis, the public are themselves likely to render abortive a great deal of the work now being undertaken in the different Sanatoria for the prevention and cure of consumption; the patients too often get but small encouragement to continue the habits and treatment observed when they were in the Tuberculosis Institution. A large part of the work of such a hospital is educative and there usually the regulations for the control of infection are most scrupulously observed; whether they continue to be so observed by the patient discharged from hospital, lies largely in the hands of the public. Take, for instance, the matter of controlling infection from the sputum. While in hospital the patient will be punctilious enough in adhering to the rule that he shall expectorate into the proper sputum pot or bottle. Let him use the latter, however, on the top of an omnibus (and be it remembered he uses it with the sole purpose of limiting risks of infection for others), let him do this and in all probability the top of the omnibus is empty in five minutes, and the people have removed themselves to the inside of the vehicle, apparently preferring the company of those who, with less knowledge and less love of their kind, pull out their more or less dry handkerchiefs, scattering everywhere the germs of previous expectorations and disseminating infection from pockets, where germ-impregnated handkerchiefs have found habitation for perhaps a year or more. Just here it might be relevant to refer to the responsibility of teaching those, in whose homes there are cases of Tuberculosis, that so long as the expectoration, or other discharges from tuberculous parts remain moist they are comparatively harmless; the sequence to imparting this knowledge will appear with added emphasis in the instruction given by the nurse regarding the proper methods to be adopted in connection with sputum pots, handkerchiefs, towels, etc. But, to return to the matter of educating the public and the attitude of that public to the tuberculous man and his preventive observances, I have heard of men saying that it is "as much as their job is worth" to be seen using the harmless, inoffensive sputum bottle which they carry, not for their own convenience, but for the preservation of the health of their fellow workers. It is the Responsibility of the Nurse to drive home the knowledge of the danger that lies in the expectoration and the necessity for encouraging, and not discouraging, the patient in his desire to limit infection; then perhaps some of those, who try to guard against passing on the disease to others, will cease to feel themselves as being more or less in the position of the lepers of the Middle Ages, will cease to regard the sputum bottle as the bell which is to "warn off" their fellow men. So strong is the prejudice against such a harmless precautionary appliance that a doctor once stated that he finds no need to buy a first-class ticket in order to avoid an overcrowded railway carriage—all that is necessary, in order to secure an empty carriage for oneself (as he proved on a journey from London to the provinces) is, unostentatiously, to discover to your fellow passengers a sputum bottle in your pocket.

But apart from such instances, there are other matters, more obvious, to which it is the responsibility of every nurse to direct the attention of those whom it may concern. Not the least of these is the advisability of educating the mothers of families, where the resistive power to the disease is known to be feeble, or where risks of infection have been incurred, on the need for observing all precautions, and particularly as to what can be done to control infection when some member of the family is already suffering from the disease. Too often much that the nurse has to teach will prove a counsel of perfection to which those, whom she would instruct, are unable to attain, as for instance in cases where housing conditions are particularly bad or

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