

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

*Whilst cordially inviting communications upon all subjects for these columns, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not in ANY WAY hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents.*

## THE STATUS OF MENTAL NURSES.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

DEAR MADAM,—There has been much discussion of late, especially from the medical point of view, regarding the two examinations for Mental Nurses at present existing—those of the General Nursing Councils of England and Wales and Scotland, and that of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, and it would appear that the R.M.P.A. has made up its mind that the G.N.C. must give way, although the former has no statutory power whatever for taking up such an attitude, nor will the mental nurse in any way benefit by its suggested proposal, rather would she lose the prestige which the Nurses' Registration Acts have obtained for her, and the progress of mental nursing for at least another fifty years would be thwarted.

Why should the medical profession be allowed to tamper with the Nurses' Registration Acts? What attitude, I wonder, would the medical element adopt if the Nursing Profession attempted to alter any of the Rules governing its Register for their own self-aggrandisement, which it would appear is the only motive the R.M.P.A. can possibly have in view? The R.M.P.A. has protested very strongly against what it considers the absurdly high entrance fees for the examinations of the General Nursing Council, but what about the £2,000 or more received into the coffers of the R.M.P.A. each year from the nurses' entrance fees, for its examinations?

The fees charged by the General Nursing Council are on an entirely statutory basis, which confers on the nurse a legal status to practise as a professional woman, just in the same way as the Universities which are now issuing Diplomas in Nursing demand a high entrance fee for candidates desiring to obtain their diplomas, thus making them of intrinsic value by giving to the recipient a degree which she could not possibly otherwise obtain, and the Rules governing the Universities apply to the principle of the certificate of the General Nursing Council, whereas the certificate of the R.M.P.A., although the nurse is allowed to obtain it practically gratis, is of no value, as it does not carry with it legal status, and cannot be recognised by any statutory body.

Why cannot the R.M.P.A. withdraw gracefully as the old order must inevitably give place to the new, otherwise there would be no definite progress? Nevertheless, the General Nursing Council is not without its responsibility to the mental nurse, and a Rule was passed by that Council, proposed by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick—the inspirer of the Nurses' Registration Acts, when a member of the first General Nursing Council for England and Wales—namely, that five years' consecutive training should qualify a nurse in any two branches of Nursing she might select for a double qualification.

On October 16th, 1924, the Mental Hospital Matrons' Association approached members of the General Nursing Council at an informal conference held in London, when representatives from General, Mental, Poor Law, and Fever Hospitals were present, and the representatives of the Mental Hospital Matrons' Association brought forward the following points:—

1. That members of the M.H.M.A. beg to ask that the Association of Hospital Matrons will co-operate with them in enabling the rules of the General Nursing Council with regard to the reciprocal shortened training for nurses going from one hospital to another to be carried into effect.

2. That nurses in Mental Hospitals who are trained for the State examinations and who have passed both prelimin-

ary and final stages under the rules of the G.N.C. should be granted the opportunity of qualifying for the general training certificate in two years—the same privilege already being given to the general trained nurse allowing her to qualify for the mental certificate in two years.

3. That a fully qualified mental nurse who is on the Supplementary part of the Register for Mental Nurses be allowed to commence her training in the general hospital as a second year nurse. It was discouraging for a nurse who had taken her three years' training in her special branch to enter a general hospital as a first year's probationer. They did not think that the girl of to-day would be willing to take a six years' training, knowing that the General Nursing Council had authorised a five years' training for the double certificate, and pointing out that the Mental Hospitals wanted the cream of the young womanhood of England to take up this important branch of nursing and it was only by giving equality of privileges that they could hope to secure the type they were so anxious to obtain as the future leaders in the Mental Section of the Nursing Profession.

4. That the Association felt confident that this system of reciprocity would not only be a great benefit to the Mental Hospitals but that the General Hospitals would benefit by obtaining the services of nurses who were already well versed in the groundwork of their Profession.

This form of reciprocity has been granted to the Sick Children's nurse and the Fever nurse, but so far the Mental nurse has been absolutely debarred from this privilege by the large General Hospitals.

After a full discussion it was, however, pointed out that the General Nursing Council was not in a position to enforce any of its Rules in the General Hospitals. Why, I ask, should a statutory body be set up if it is unable to enforce the Rules which that body itself has drawn up and sanctioned?

I hope that Mental Nurses who are now enfranchised citizens will rouse themselves and take the matter up strongly with their Members of Parliament.

It is a matter for all branches of the Nursing profession to take up seriously, because if the R.M.P.A. succeeds in its efforts, the other branches are, I consider, equally unsafe.

I am, Dear Madam,

Yours faithfully,

ELIZABETH L. MACAULAY.

Kent County Mental Hospital,  
Maidstone.

## KERNELS FROM CORRESPONDENCE.

Miss M. Stewart Bryson (Winchmore Hill, N.), writes: "It was a great disappointment on October 26th, at the British College of Nurses to find that our President could not be present. The occasion was a great success, and most interesting were the speeches, which one realised more on reading THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING, so inspiring and full of information."

Mrs. A. E. Tribble (Truro), writes: "My subscription to THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING is due and I am sending it. I must say how much I appreciate it coming each month, as I am quite in the country, and being away from what I have been accustomed to, am interested in all that is so well described."

## OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

We regret we are unable to award a prize this month, no paper having attained the prize standard.

## PRIZE COMPETITION QUESTION FOR JANUARY, 1929.

What do you understand by the following: Quarantine; segregation; barrier nursing; bed isolation?

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