

Such additional maternity beds will require the services of additional trained nurses who possess their C.M.B. certificate.

Health Visitors.

There is an ever-increasing demand for nurses holding the approved certificate of health visiting, not only to staff the existing service properly, but to increase the effectiveness of the supervision of the child between one to five years.

The provision of accommodation for ailing babies suffering from defects of nutrition and similar ailments, and recognition by the Ministry of many such residential homes for babies, formerly under the control of philanthropic bodies, the provision and maintenance of day nurseries and of homes for unmarried mothers, and the urgent further services to the pre-school child are all opportunities of wider service to the trained nurse, and especially to the nurse who is alert to the need for specialisation.

THE ACTION OF ALCOHOL UPON THE BLOOD-SUGAR IN DIABETES MELLITUS.

Dr. T. C. Hunt, B.M.Oxf., M.R.C.P.Lond., Medical Registrar, St. Mary's Hospital, contributes to *The Lancet* (January 18th) a very interesting article on the above subject, which he introduces as follows:—

"There is considerable difference of opinion about the value of alcohol in the treatment of diabetes mellitus, but that it has a use in this condition can hardly be doubted. Since alcohol can spare fat, approximately in the ratio of the calorie values of the two substances—i.e., 7 to 9—it must clearly be considered a valuable foodstuff, and since there is no evidence that it can itself form carbohydrate in the body, it appears at first sight to be a particularly suitable source of energy in diabetes. Few clinicians, however, are prepared to lay great stress upon the actual food value of alcohol, because, viewed in terms of calories alone, it can almost always be readily replaced by other substances. On the other hand, there are important considerations, apart from its simple energy value. It has a place as a mental sedative in periods of partial or complete starvation, and as an aid to appetite, and it makes the often one-sided diets of the diabetic more palatable.

"More important still is its action upon the hyperglycæmia, glycosuria, and ketonuria of diabetes, and a large amount of work has been done on the effect of alcohol upon the amounts of sugar and ketone bodies passed in the urine. On the whole, this work has shown some diminution, both in the glycosuria and in the ketonuria, but only when moderate amounts of alcohol have been given; excessive quantities have consistently produced the reverse effect. This has especially been noted when the excessive alcohol intake has been sufficient to raise the total calorie intake above a maximum optimum level."

Dr. Hunt discusses the experimental results in a number of diabetic patients, especially from the point of view of the action of alcohol, in a form most commonly ordered, upon the fasting blood-sugar, in patients at rest in bed in the medical unit wards of St. Mary's Hospital, and also the effect of alcohol plus food on six patients who were examined with the object of determining whether the hypoglycæmic action of brandy in diabetes could also be observed when it was given together with carbohydrate in the form of the customary sugar tolerance test.

CONCLUSIONS.

Dr. Hunt's conclusions are, in part, as follows:—

"A medicinal dose of brandy is capable of lowering the fasting blood-sugar in a diabetic, and this action is brought about after absorption of the drug into the blood stream. The exact mechanism is not easily explained. It is possible that it is brought about through an action of alcohol upon the liver, by which the function of this organ in secreting glycogen is improved, since alcohol may be more readily burnt and more storage of sugar can take place; in other words, a true carbohydrate-sparing effect may be produced.

Alcohol has a powerful stimulant effect on gastric secretion not solely due to its local action upon the mucous membrane. Steinitz and Schereschewsky found that 300 c.cm. of 5 per cent. alcohol given per rectum caused a rapid and copious secretion of gastric juice; the maximum flow occurring in 15 to 30 minutes; glucose, water, saline, and other solutions similarly administered had no such effect. There is, moreover, some evidence (Gley and Hazard) suggesting that the entrance of hydrochloric acid into the duodenum may provoke some secretion of insulin into the blood; it undoubtedly increases the output of external pancreatic secretion.

"Thus alcohol, through its stimulant action upon gastric secretion and an increased production of 'secretin' and of pancreatic secretion, might in this way provoke a moderate output of insulin itself. . . . Whatever the precise explanation, it is certain that alcohol has no specific individual action upon islet tissue, nor is the action in lowering blood-sugar in diabetes confined to alcohol alone, since many other substances possess a similar property. At the same time brandy is a readily available drug, and its associated actions may at times make it a particularly valuable one in therapeutics. In diabetic coma it would seem to be of value, either by mouth or per rectum; moderate amounts as an addition to or substitute for part of the diabetic diet appear to have no detrimental influence upon the hyperglycæmia."

PSITTACOSIS.

An outbreak of a disease which is attracting much attention, and which is of considerable severity, not infrequently ending fatally, is Psittacosis or "Parrot Disease." So far its origin has not been discovered, and both at the London Hospital, and the Dreadnought Hospital, Greenwich, it is being closely studied. It may resemble paratyphoid or pneumonia, and that it is infectious is proved by the fact that recently a person who had caught the disease from an infected parrot conveyed it to a third. Direct contact with an infected bird is therefore not necessary.

Cases appear to be sporadic rather than epidemic. Three cases in one family have occurred in Birmingham, all being admitted to the General Hospital and one ending fatally. As mentioned by the Coroner at the inquest on the father of the family it was a matter of public importance to investigate the circumstances of the case, and to establish, if possible, the association between the death of the parrots owned by the deceased, and the disease from which he died.

Cases have also appeared in Berlin and six deaths have occurred there, and one at Altona, near Hamburg. In this case both doctor and nurse attending the patient in the hospital contracted the disease, but both recovered. The Berlin Health Department, as reported in the *Lancet*, consider that nervousness is unfounded amongst those keeping parrots as pets. Only those birds which have just come from Brazil need be regarded as suspect.

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