

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

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No. 1,953. Vol. 79.

APRIL, 1931.

Price Sevenpence

EDITORIAL.

CORONERS' NURSES.

A department of public life with which the community comes little into contact is that of the Coroners' Courts. This, perhaps, may be the reason why susceptibilities may, in certain instances, be shocked, and, in our opinion, the institution of Coroners' Nurses might have the required humanising effect.

There is a Coroner for London and Southwark, and the County of London is divided into Districts, over each of which a Coroner presides.

Various Borough Councils maintain public mortuaries where the bodies of deceased persons, upon whom post-mortems or inquests may be necessary, are received by a mortuary attendant. Almost invariably, though we know of one exception, the mortuary attendant is a man.

Recently there was brought to our knowledge the case of a refined gentlewoman whose sudden and unexpected death caused the removal of her body, by direction of the Coroner, to a public mortuary, where a post-mortem examination was made.

Upon enquiry, we learnt that the body was received, handled and prepared for the examination by the male mortuary attendant, and we find that this is the usual procedure.

Naturally we were greatly shocked to find such arrangements prevailing in public mortuaries, and to realise the repulsion such manipulation would have caused to the dead, and to those who loved her if known and apprehended.

We have no hesitation in expressing the opinion that decency demands that the handling of dead women in public mortuaries should be the duty of women, whatever may have been their position in life, rich or poor, gentle or simple.

In the instance to which we refer, a Registered Nurse was, by request of the relatives, sent to the mortuary to perform the last offices and prepare the body for burial, with the result that before it was viewed by those near and dear to her everything had been arranged as beautifully and reverently as possible, and there was no evidence of the extensive post-mortem to give pain to the relatives.

This incident has convinced us of the necessity for urgent reform, and we suggest that there is need for the

appointment in connection with public mortuaries and Coroners' Courts of Coroners' Nurses, to receive all bodies removed to the mortuaries, to prepare them for post-mortem examinations, to be present, and when necessary to assist medical practitioners at these, and, subsequently, to perform the last offices in a seemly manner.

We may add that, in our opinion, a reception room should be provided for those who visit these mortuaries to identify, or to view, the bodies of deceased persons, apart from the office in which business is transacted both over the telephone and personally. And we most strongly urge that, just as a medical practitioner is deputed by the Coroner to perform certain functions, so a Coroner's Nurse should be appointed with definite duties.

We were informed by a Coroner's Officer who saw no reason for the attendance of a woman in public mortuaries, "We don't take any notice of sex here." Most emphatically we claim that notice should be taken of sex, and that from their reception to the time of their removal, the bodies of women should in every instance be cared for by women.

Unquestionably those entrusted with this duty should be carefully selected. The care of the body after death is an office which some nurses regard as a high privilege. We have no doubt whatever that nurses would come forward to apply for such appointments in sufficient numbers were they established. Able to visualise most vividly the present position they could not fail to be moved by the mute appeal of numbers of their sex confided to the care of public mortuaries, and would welcome the opportunity of reverently and tenderly preparing the worn bodies for burial.

Again, a woman of the right type can best deal with grief-stricken relatives in the first sharpness of their bereavement.

Let us not be misunderstood. We believe the officials of the Coroners' Courts to be kindly disposed and that they perform their duties with discretion and courtesy, but we repeat that it is neither decent nor seemly that the bodies of women should be handled by male mortuary attendants.

It seems almost incredible that this practice has been tolerated for so long.

We call upon the Coroners of England to insist upon reform on this question.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)