

**MEMORANDUM TO THE GENERAL NURSING COUNCIL ON THE PRELIMINARY EDUCATION OF NURSES.**

The signatories to this memorandum have all been engaged in various aspects of the training of nurses; in selection, organisation, lecturing, teaching or examining. They represent a Training School which may claim to have done much to advance and perfect nursing training and education, in both its academic and practical aspects.

Speaking, therefore, with that weight of authority which long experience gives, they most earnestly beg the attention of the General Nursing Council to the following points, in the hope that no step will be taken to jeopardise the selection and high efficiency of the modern nurse to which the output of all the great Nursing Schools in the country furnishes such irrefutable testimony.

1. The proposal to relegate the teaching of Anatomy, Physiology and Elementary Hygiene, leading up to Part 1 of the State Examination, to the School period would, in our opinion, be a seriously retrograde step, for the following reasons:—

- i. The teaching of these subjects would then have to be given in a very large number of schools instead of being concentrated in a much smaller number of hospitals as at present.
- ii. The teachers in such schools would rarely, if ever, possess a standard of practical expertness comparable to those who are at present responsible for this fundamental part of nursing education.
- iii. In any circumstances, such teaching must be entirely theoretical and quite divorced from concurrent contact with living persons, by which alone the use of such knowledge is explained by professional men and women and made fully understandable by pupils who are seeing the application of the facts so taught in their daily work.
- iv. It therefore follows that such a system, besides being technically inadequate and narrowly theoretical, must also be wastefully uneconomic, in that it would necessitate the provision of such teaching in such a large number of schools to a relatively small number of pupils in each case.
- v. Much has been made of the example of the preliminary education of the medical student, but the facts are not relevant because—
  - (a) many schools are equipped to give that training;
  - (b) notwithstanding such equipment, the kind of training by persons altogether unassociated with Medicine is found to be inadequate as a foundation for professional study, and is not accepted as sufficient by a number of Universities.
- vi. The time occupied by these new subjects in the school curriculum would be more advantageously occupied in one or both to the following ways:—
  - (a) the Arts side of school education—languages (particularly English), Literature, Music, Elocution, etc., giving a firmer basis of general culture, so indispensable to the highest types of the Nursing profession.
  - (b) Elementary Science—Physics, Chemistry, Botany and Zoology. Some preliminary knowledge of these subjects is particularly useful as a preparation for the subsequent studies of the nursing curriculum, and such instruction can be adequately given at school.

2. One of the greatest objections to the suggested procedure would be the inevitable alteration in the present methods of selection of nurses for training. While there will be almost entire agreement that a high educational standing and capacity should be demanded of entrants, no Matron of experience, no Hospital Physician or Surgeon,

but would demand "something more" than this as an indispensable quality for a good nurse. Nursing is not mere technical efficiency; it is a vocation demanding certain qualities of personality and character which can only be most accurately estimated by those whose life-work has qualified them to do so; by practical Matrons who, by the possession of these very qualities, have come to be the responsible Heads of those Nursing Schools for which they to-day do their best to select candidates of all-round promise.

After the preliminary selection by a Matron so qualified there is in most of the larger and more important Schools—and it is upon such schools that the eyes of the Reformers are more particularly fixed—the Pupil-probationers' Preliminary Training School. The whole-time study work here undertaken enables a further "weeding-out" process to take place, whereby a certain number of girls who are found (for a large variety of reasons) to be unsuitable for the nursing profession, are removed from it with the minimum waste of time, money and disappointment—if nothing worse.

3. If this preliminary teaching is relegated to the schools the following results must inevitably follow:—

- i. Headmistresses, who have not the slightest practical knowledge of the requirements of the nursing profession, would select or approve the girls they thought suitable.
- ii. Upon such selected girls, parents would spend money upon an extended educational period in full reliance that the passing of Part 1 of the State Examination would entitle their daughters to entry to the best Training Schools, as by right. Such claim would rapidly become irresistible in practice, and Matrons and Hospital Committees would find that they had surrendered for ever their present expert and practical method of selection of nurses who minister to the welfare and happiness of the patients.
- iii. They would thus permit to be thrust upon them a supply of inexpertly selected, imperfectly (because theoretically) taught, and often temperamentally unsuitable girls.
- iv. This imperfect teaching would be in respect of those subjects—anatomy and physiology—which are the bedrock of, and indispensable preparation for, all intelligent understanding of the study of medicine, surgery, gynaecology, obstetrics, and all the processes of disease to which it is a nurse's duty to minister with both intelligence and sympathy.
- v. There would be a further undesirable result. Together with the production of a body of girls urged by schoolmistresses into preparation for a nursing career there would be a corresponding and greater diminution in the number of young women who, having arrived at a thinking age, would elect to take up Nursing, but, finding themselves lacking a certificate (State, Part 1), would abandon the idea. This tends to exclude those young women graduates and Higher School Certificated girls whose entry into the Nursing Profession it has been our principal aim to secure.

4. DO THE MATRONS AND THE NURSING COMMITTEES OF THE GREATER NURSING SCHOOLS, WHICH MUST NECESSARILY BE THE PROTAGONISTS OF ALL GENUINE ADVANCE IN NURSING IDEALS AND EFFICIENCY, REALLY DESIRE THIS? DO THEY REALLY GRASP THE FACT THAT IT MUST INEVITABLY LEAD TO THIS CATASTROPHIC SURRENDER?

5. It has been almost a parrot-cry for long enough that the modern nurse is "lecture-ridden"; it is raised not merely by outsiders without practical knowledge and experience of nursing, but by many members of the Staffs of Hospitals, particularly those who have taken little or no part in the actual work of nursing education and examining.

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