

## OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

### STATE THE USUAL CAUSES OF NERVOUS BREAKDOWN AND HOW TO RELIEVE THEM WITH NURSING CARE.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this month to Miss Winifred Moss, The County Hospital, Bedford.

#### PRIZE PAPER.

The most usual cause of nervous breakdown is emotional stress. Other conditions, such as occupation, exhausting diseases, accidents and nerve poisons, often predispose or even appear directly to cause the breakdown, but a strong psychological element is always found to be operating at the same time. Physical fatigue and overstrain create the predisposing condition, and when prolonged worry and stress are added, they usually act as the determining factors, especially if the patient possesses a very sensitive disposition and imagines the very worst that can happen in all circumstances, and worries about possibilities which may never mature.

A breakdown may be caused by the disorganisation of the nervous system by some sudden and intense shock, for example, the sudden and violent death of a dear relative. This shock may come to a person whose constitution is already undermined by overwork, and disaster results.

Repressed emotions may cause a breakdown. The effort to keep feeling in its place results in mental conflict which causes mental and physical exhaustion. Everyone knows that a good cry relieves pent up grief and that the expression of a strong feeling minimises its strength, while bottled up emotion is liable to ferment and cause further strain on an already overtaxed nervous system. Usually it is the long-nursed grievance, the unrequited affection, the insidious action of repressed emotions which do this.

The stimulus of brain work is good for the nervous system to a certain extent, but worry soon tires and the uncertainties of position and employment cause a constant strain, which, together with overwork, results in a mental and physical breakdown.

Occupation is an important causative factor, as brain workers and people of the professions are the most commonly affected. This is because it is the highly strung, quick-thinking people who find their natural bent in a career where they will have to display much more mental than physical activity. Emotional distress affects these people much more easily and so their response to the difficulties of life may be faulty and breakdown result.

Heredity is also an important causative factor. Inherited weakness of the brain tissue renders it less fit to bear the added strain of intense mental stress, or of any unusual, prolonged, worry or grief.

So closely connected are body and mind that any debilitating illness or chronic poisoning may lower the resistance of the body and so predispose to a nervous breakdown.

Accidents and operations, however small, cause some degree of shock, they affect the already lowered bodily resistance and pave the way for the psychological factor, which may be the last straw needed to cause the final collapse.

Relief of the causes by nursing care includes treat-

ment of the body and the mind. Sympathy and firmness on the part of the nurse are essential, and attention to the symptoms complained of, will gain the patient's confidence and help him to acquire a new interest in life and a desire to improve. The influence of mind over body shows that a cheerful and optimistic nurse will convey to the patient an atmosphere of confidence and tranquility.

The relief of the symptoms complained of forms an important part of the treatment, together with the building up of the general health.

The nurse must be a good listener, emphasising the fact that the symptoms can be overcome, and be willing to discuss with the patient how and why they have arisen.

The diet should be liberal and nourishing, and as gastric disturbances are often an important symptom, care should be taken to avoid individual idiosyncrasies. All drinks and diets should be attractively served.

Rest is essential, both of body and mind, and this should be made as interesting as possible by making the sick room and its surroundings cheerful and comfortable.

Light reading and books of poetry or any restful work the patient fancies, or has asked for, should be placed on a small bed-side table. A clock and a light switch should be at hand for the patient's convenience and the light conveniently shaded and adjusted.

Irritating and harmful stimuli from without should be cut off, and visitors arranged for with the doctor without continually bothering the patient as to whom he wishes to see.

Thus we see that the personality of the nurse is of great importance when caring for a patient with a nervous breakdown. This consists very largely of the ability to understand the mental attitude of the patient and also of being confident of being able to help in a definite manner.

#### HONOURABLE MENTION.

Honourable mention is accorded to Miss G. K. Bush for an admirable paper.

Miss Bush gives some excellent advice. She writes: "Hypnotics and sedatives may be ordered, but extreme care is to be exercised in their use—the patient must not be allowed to rely on them, and simple methods of inducing sleep should be tried first. Much can be done by suggestion, a bath or sponging is soothing, and sometimes carefully chosen literature, read slowly and in a quiet voice, is an additional help.

"So far, only the physical aspect has been considered but that is almost of secondary importance. The mental state is the real cause of the breakdown. This is found in patients where there is an unresolved emotional conflict, the resulting breakdown being the way of escape from a difficult situation."

"The nursing of these patients makes great demands upon the nurse, and it may be regarded as a very special branch."

#### QUESTION FOR NEXT MONTH.

Describe the dangers to health from overcrowding, and how the Registered Nurse can participate in preventing and alleviating them.

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