

WOMEN ORDERLIES IN THE L.C.C. HOSPITALS.

The establishment by the London County Council at its meeting on July 30th of a grade of workers to be known as "women orderlies" who, as the Council agree, "cannot be classified either as nursing or domestic staff" has been given much prominence in the press, and from the way in which the question has been presented it is evident that the points at issue are widely misunderstood; moreover, the issues have been further obscured by its association with the working hours of nurses. If the Council consider the working hours of nurses in their hospitals too long and their domestic duties too hard, the direct course would be to increase the nursing staff and the number of ward-maids, not to create a hybrid worker whom they designate "a woman orderly."

Proposals for fixing the establishments of the nursing staff, including women orderlies, at twelve of the acute general hospitals under the management of the Council which are recognised as training schools for nurses, were made to the Council by the Hospitals and Medical Services Committee on July 30th.

In their report the Committee say:—

"Ward orderlies (female) were employed, to the number of 25, at two of the general hospitals now under review at the time of their transfer to the Council, and the scales of salary and conditions of service approved for domestic staff on July 25th, 1933, included a scale of salary for this grade. . . .

"The duties of women orderlies would be practically the same as those at present performed by them at the hospitals, now under consideration, at which they are employed, and would generally include the following: (1) dusting, cleaning and polishing of wards, ward equipment and fittings, making up ward fires and filling hot-water bottles; (2) cleaning sanitary annexes and their equipment, sorting soiled linen, scrubbing bed mackintoshes; (3) assisting in preparation of meals, *e.g.*, cutting bread and butter, making tea, boiling eggs, etc.; and in distribution of meals, *e.g.*, taking round cups and plates, bread-and-butter trolley, tea, dinners, etc.; clearing away crockery, cutlery, utensils, etc., after patients' meals; (4) in chronic and convalescent hospitals and blocks; assisting with 'chronic' or 'convalescent' persons requiring help on account of age (*e.g.*, elderly people and children), in feeding, washing, blanket bathing and taking to the bath; also assisting in the making of beds and the combing of heads; and (5) assisting the senior nursing staff, if required, in the blanket bathing, dressing, moving or making of the bed of a patient when the work involves the services of two persons simultaneously. Except in circumstances as indicated in (5) women orderlies will not attend ordinarily to any patients who are ill, such patients being attended to solely by members of the nursing staff.

"Women orderlies cannot be classified as either nursing or domestic staff."

Recommendations.

These proposals were incorporated in a series of recommendations.

Recommendation 1 (*a*) proposed the approval of a special estimate of expenditure on maintenance account of £38,135 in the financial year 1935-36, and eventually an average annual expenditure of £82,315 in respect of the fixation of the nursing staff and women orderlies at twelve of the acute general hospitals under the management of the Hospitals and Medical Services Committee.

Motion by Dr. Barrie Lambert.

To this recommendation 1 (*a*) Dr. Barrie Lambert, seconded by Mr. Allpass, gave notice of the following motion:—

"That the recommendation be referred back to the Committee with instructions to bring up a fixation of the

nursing staff on a less extravagant and more equitable basis, and with the omission of the employment, in hospitals approved as complete training schools for nurses, of women orderlies on nursing duties which, in the interests alike of patients and of probationer nurses, should not be undertaken by untrained persons."

In a reasoned and logical speech, showing an intimate knowledge of facts and figures in relation to the hospitals concerned, Dr. Barrie Lambert maintained that the Council should not be prepared to fix maximum and extravagant staffs and hand the matter over to the officers. It was a matter the Committee should themselves carefully supervise. Unless the Chairman of the Committee was prepared to study the figures weekly they should come to Committee once a month. Most anomalies were capable of satisfactory explanation, and it was extraordinary how anomalies disappeared when figures were scrutinised regularly.

Concerning the proposal to employ a new class of orderlies to be called Women Orderlies, Dr. Barrie Lambert pointed out on the question of ward organisation that the Municipal Reformers had never advocated rough cleaning by nurses. There was a ward-maid in each ward, and the ward-maid did all the scrubbing, heavy sweeping and polishing of floors, grates, washing-up, etc. No domestic assistance was ever refused by the Finance Committee. The domestic staff had been increased at a cost of £42,500.

Certain authorities had tried a superior grade of ward maid for light duties, cleaning, meals, etc., called ward orderlies. When the London County Council took over the poor-law hospitals they found ward orderlies in three of the hospitals, graded as *domestic staff*. They were transferred staff with full rights, and had they been dismissed they would have had to be compensated.

The present proposition was that they should no longer be graded as domestic staff but were to be *intermediate* between the domestic staff and the nurses, and further were to be "*in addition to, or in substitution for, probationer nurses.*"

Ward Organisation.

In December, 1933, the Central Public Health Committee called for a report on ward organisation, and asked the Medical Officer to deal with the question of ward orderlies. On May 4th, 1934, the Medical Officer brought up his report and stated "I have no observations to make on the system of grading of the staff employed in the wards of the acute hospitals, except in one *important respect*, and that is to suggest that the ward organisation should include an *additional grade of woman nursing orderly*, whose duties would *chiefly* consist of the cleaning work now carried out by probationer nurses during their first year of training." Had the M.O. stated "duties consisting entirely of cleaning" no objection would be raised, though we might, said Dr. Lambert, consider it unwise.

This recommendation was passed by the Hospitals and Medical Services Committee on May 10th, 1935.

Proposals for Women Orderlies.

Speaking on the recommendations *seriatim*, Dr. Barrie Lambert said that 1 and 2 set out domestic duties, mainly cleaning, to which she raised no objection, except to two items on which she was sure the nursing profession would have something to say. (Presumably Dr. Lambert referred to the cleaning of bedpans and porringers. As nurses are aware, it is an important nursing duty to inspect the contents of these appliances after removal, before cleansing, and to report on any abnormalities.)

No. 3 dealt with the preparation of meals, again no objection. Nos. 1, 2 and 3 would, however, not take more than four to five hours' work at most. The speaker pointed out that the bulk of the cleaning in the ward has to be finished

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