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EDITORIAL.

THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL.

A NURSING SERVICE COMMITTEE REQUIRED.

During the last quarter of a century many Nursing Services have been greatly expanded, but in none has the increase been more phenomenal than in that of the London County Council, which is now responsible for the Nursing in the hospitals formerly administered by the Poor Law Guardians, and by the Metropolitan Asylums Board—now abolished—in the great hospitals under its control. In addition the School Nursing Service, which includes over 500 nurses, who have rendered, and are rendering, such splendid service in connection with the school children of London, is controlled by the London County Council.

Surely, to deal with this great body of Public Servants, trained and in training, numbering some 10,000 persons, many of them highly trained, expert, professional women, there should be appointed by the London County Council a Nursing Service Committee on which the opinion and co-operation of nurse-educationists and organisers are available. Such a Committee would have ample scope without controlling other departments.

A Service of 10,000 indispensable social workers, the Municipal Nurses of the County of London, deserve to be treated with some degree of responsibility by the Council, keeping always in mind the honourable status of such a Corps.

But what of the present system? The Nursing Staff of the London County Council is "under the management" of The Hospitals and Medical Services Committee which deals with all matters connected with each of its 33 hospitals and institutions, including the rebuilding and reconstruction of hospitals, their equipment and the necessary estimates, outpatients' treatment and many other matters. What wonder, then, that the management of the Nursing Staff can receive but a small portion of its attention. Even if the Committee included Nursing experts in administration and education, which it does not, its task would be impossible, but the fact is that this Committee, composed of 24 persons, six of whom are medical practitioners, to which is deputed the management of thousands of nurses, trained and in training, does not include one State Registered Nurse.

It is thus inevitable that disorganisation, so far as a body of professional women is concerned, has resulted from management by a supervising authority so constituted, as demonstrated by its latest ukase concerning working hours which came into force in the Hospitals it controls on October 1st.

The most serious of these new Rules, because it affects the welfare of the patients, is the extension of the span of duty of Sisters and Staff Nurses to 9 p.m. instead of 8.30 p.m., and that during this extra half hour a Sister or Staff Nurse is alone on duty in a ward for 15 minutes of the time. A serious accident case, needing preparation for operation, a delirious patient, and an impending death, to say nothing of attempted suicide, may all during this time need individual attention which it is impossible that they should receive.

Again, the effect of lengthening the span of duty to 9 p.m. is to render practically impossible the modicum of social life enjoyed by the Nursing Staff when off duty.

A further point, as related in another column, is that the hours off duty on Sundays were so arranged as to make it impossible for members of the Nursing Staff to attend a congenial place of worship. Already, we understand that, as the result of the publicity given to the subject by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick in *The Daily Telegraph*, and the interest aroused in consequence, an extension of these hours has been officially announced, proving the ignorance of practical details on the part of those responsible in connection with the Nursing conditions for which they were making regulations.

"REGARDED AS FLUID."

The latest instance of the ineptitude of the Hospitals and Medical Services Committee in regard to Nursing matters is the proposal that the total number of the Nursing Staff under their management (except Matrons and Assistant Matrons) should be "regarded as fluid" pending the settlement by the Council of a fixed establishment, and that authority should be given to the Medical Officer of Health to effect transfers of such staff as necessary.

It would certainly not be conducive to contentment on the part of Sisters and Staff Nurses, who give devoted service in wards to which they become attached, nor could they be expected to take the same interest in these wards if they knew that they themselves were "regarded as fluid." We have no doubt concerning the disorganisation of ward service which this peripatetic scramble would effect.

The result of the inexperience of the Hospitals and Medical Services Committee, so far as the management of the Nursing Service is concerned, has been fatal to its efficiency. Let a new and modern system of Nursing organisation and control be established by the London County Council.

We call for the appointment of a Nursing Service Committee, composed of persons with practical knowledge of nursing education and organisation, to administer this indispensable Department of a great Public Service.

WE are the Ratepayers.

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