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## EDITORIAL.

### THE CARE OF AGED CHRONICS.

The problem of the care and nursing of aged chronics in our rate-maintained hospitals is one that has yet to be satisfactorily solved.

Three main factors jump to the eye. The patient—the nurse—the expense.

One has only even cursorily to wander through the long wards of a State hospital, full to overflowing with this class of patients—both male and female—to become uncomfortably aware that the staffing of them must be a heart-searching proposition for the humane and conscientious matron.

One reads from time to time of Royal letters of congratulation to the centenarian—one meets folk who boast of friends in their ninth decade, and one falls to pondering whether this increasing longevity is, broadly speaking, a blessing.

In the case of the many hundreds in our sick wards assuredly it cannot be so accounted.

Torn from their familiar surroundings, from their little homely comforts, from the loving, if unskilled, hands which tended them as long as humanly possible, they find themselves at last in a spotless ward of a hospital, there to remain until "Death the Consoler" sets them free from the "body of their humiliation."

At its best—that is, when the body is comparatively free from pain and the spirit of the optimist inhabits it—the outlook is, as far as this life is concerned, hopeless and terribly monotonous.

The ordered round of waking, washing, meal time, the all too infrequent visiting day, occur without variation. But what of those whose bodies are racked with pain—because of malignant disease, or the dread rheumatoid arthritis—whose limbs are useless, who cannot even turn in bed to find an easier spot or to reach little trifles from the locker—whose sight is gone so that they cannot pass the long hours by reading? "If I could only walk, I am sure a little quinine would put strength into my legs"—"if I could only see!"

Even visiting hours bring no solace to all, for there are, alas! many that have no friends.

The touching, uncomplaining endurance of the majority is something to which to take off one's hat.

Though one has nothing but admiration for many of the young nurses who go patiently up and down the long wards, ceaselessly tending their helpless charges—changing, washing, feeding—many who are quite

incapable of appreciating their ministrations, one realises that their work demands too great a strain on youth and ambition.

No doubt the experience is very valuable and calls out true nursing instinct and generosity of character. But there is no denying the fact that much of the work is repulsive, wearisome, back-breaking, heart-breaking, and apparently unproductive.

Many more nurses are needed to minister adequately to these helpless sufferers, and to ease the strain on young nurses.

How is this shortage to be met?

Here, of course, comes the question of cost to the already overburdened ratepayers. Trained nursing is admittedly a very costly item.

A State Registered Sister is, of course, indispensable, but can it be argued that the entire subordinate staff must be drawn from student nurses?

In some male wards the uncertificated attendants do excellent work, they are kind and gentle to their charges and are highly spoken of by them. They work loyally under the trained Sister who is responsible.

This demonstrates that highly skilled nursing for this type of patient is often wasted.

Throughout the war the women of this country rose in their hundreds to undertake confidently nursing work for which many highly skilled nurses diffidently offered themselves.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

To-day work is crying out to the idle woman volunteer, and for which the "born nurse" would be invaluable.

A few hours per day per week from such kindly volunteers, regularly given and so to be depended upon, would revolutionise our chronic wards.

"My pillow is so uncomfortable." "The sun is in my eyes." "I can't reach my locker." "Nurse is very kind, but she is so busy I don't like to bother her."

Meal time—when the food cools for want of sufficient hands to feed the helpless. "The little more how much it is." A hundred and one little ministrations which make all the difference to hurt feelings and suffering bodies. Must professional custom come before such opportunities as these for women whose chief weariness is lack of occupation, and who could find a fresh zest in life by sacrificing an hour or two of their freedom and so-called pleasure to relieve in ever so small a degree those others who so inscrutably are "laid at our gate full of sores."

Who will lead this crusade of voluntary service?

HENRIETTA HAWKINS.

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