

Royal British Nurses' Association.

Incorporated by



Royal Charter.

THIS SUPPLEMENT BEING THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE CORPORATION.

THE ANNUAL MEETING.

The Annual General Meeting of the Corporation will be held on Friday, June 4th, at 3 p.m., when we hope to have a large attendance of the members. Tea will be served after the Meeting.

LECTURE ON CANCER.

By MALCOLM DONALDSON, F.R.C.S.

Recognising that nurses can do a great deal to bring to the public a realisation of the importance of the early treatment of cancer, we were very pleased to accept the offer of a lecture from the British Empire Cancer Campaign and were fortunate in having, on 27th April, as the lecturer, at 194, Queen's Gate, S.W., Dr. Malcolm Donaldson, F.R.C.S., who has done so much to advance the study, prevention and treatment of cancer. It is not always easy, said the lecturer, to persuade lay people to talk about the subject of cancer, because they are afraid of it. If the public could be persuaded to talk about cancer, people would gradually lose their fear of it. Two mistaken beliefs about cancer have become fixed in the minds of lay people. They think that it comes on suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, and that it is always accompanied by great pain. The first assumption is incorrect, and it is only in the later stages, and not always then, that pain arises.

Nurses should be able to tell people something of the more common types of cancer. The body is composed of minute cells. If questioned about the size of these it can be pointed out that on the back of the hand alone there are over 650,000,000 cells. As life progresses the cells of the skin grow old and are worn off, and the same thing happens within the body. Those which are thus lost have to be replaced, and nature does this by means of cell-division. In adults the rate of multiplication exactly balances the rate of loss of older cells, but in children the rate of multiplication is much greater, since the child's body has to grow. Sometimes the mechanism of the body, whereby cell division takes place, goes wrong and the cells multiply at such a rate that a lump is formed. A cancer cell is one which has, so to speak, "run mad"; division is going on too quickly. The lumps which are formed are not always cancer, but in time, if neglected, they may give rise to it. Many chronic ulcers also develop into cancer. It is of the greatest importance that people should be taught that they should always seek early advice about any lump or swelling, even if it is not painful. Of course, many tumours are innocent, but in time they may become malignant. An investigation carried out by the Ministry of Health showed that something like 50 per cent. of the patients do not seek advice until six months after the cancer has begun, thus considerably reducing the chances of cure, although something can be done to make the patient more comfortable. The belief, that pain is always present with cancer, has grown up through the fact that so many people do not go to the doctor for advice until they feel pain: only in

its late stages is cancer painful. There is also a mistaken belief that operations for cancer must be very painful, whereas, the truth is that after the first day or so there is very little discomfort, and what pain there is can usually be relieved with morphia. The dread of cancer is further increased by the belief that nothing can be done for it. That this is a totally erroneous belief is shown by the statistics of cures, and especially those from the Marie Curie Hospital in Hampstead. This hospital is run entirely by women and has probably the highest proportion of cures of any hospital in the world dealing entirely with cancer. Its figures of cures, when the disease has been taken in its early stage, is 70 per cent, and, taking all cases into consideration, late as well as early, 42 per cent. is the figure given.

In women, by far the commonest sign of cancer is irregular hæmorrhage (*i.e.*, metrorrhagia and post-climacteric bleeding), but the fear of operation prevents many women from seeking advice about this. Sometimes ignorant people say that operation causes the cancer to spread all over the body and that it brings on the disease, causing it to become painful; the truth is that they have probably heard about a friend who went to seek advice too late. It is not operation that spreads the disease; on the contrary the nature of cancer is such that it spreads equally quickly in its advanced stages whether there has been an operation or not. Very often pain after operation does increase if the case has been left too long untreated, although in many cases, where cure is impossible, an operation can do something to relieve the symptoms for a time at least. The most suitable treatment for each case must be decided by the doctors. Sometimes surgical intervention is advisable and in other cases radium or X-ray treatment alone are used, or all methods may be combined. Cancer of the body of the uterus is usually treated surgically; cancer of the cervix with radium and X-ray therapy. As a rule, surgical methods are employed for the earlier cases of cancer of the breast and in the later stages radium and X-ray only are used.

People are always asking what is the cause of cancer and we often hear it stated that "No one really knows what causes it." Advances are being made year by year by groups of workers all over the world who are dealing with the problem from different aspects. It is quite wrong to say that nothing is yet known. The whole problem may be likened to a great jig-saw puzzle. Gradually pieces of it are being fitted together by different groups, but, until all the pieces are collected and the whole picture is built up, the public cannot hope to understand much about it. Certain facts have come to light already, for example, a considerable amount is known about the so-called "occupational cancer." In certain trades it was found that cancer was much more common than in others, and a notable example of this was in the spinning trade in the North of England. The workers used to be constantly hit by parts of the machinery at the same time that the front of their thighs were smothered in oil. These two

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