

The Midwife.

THE MIDWIVES ACT, 1936

The following paper written by Miss Margaret Breay, was presented by Miss Isabel Macdonald, at the Opening Meeting of the Winter Session of the British College of Nurses.

The Midwives Act, 1936, and the new Rules (Section B) of the Central Midwives Board raise important questions affecting State Registered Nurses, Maternity Nurses, and State Certified Midwives.

The Midwives Act, 1902, was "an Act to secure the better training of Midwives and to regulate their practice," and the subsequent Acts, including that of 1936, deal solely with midwives.

The Central Midwives Board has recently revised its Rules of Training and Examination, and has drawn up a very comprehensive course of training. In the case of nurses whose names appear (Rule B. 4 (a) (i)) on the Registers of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, the General Nursing Council for Scotland, the Joint Nursing and Midwives' Council for Northern Ireland, or the General Nursing Council of the Irish Free State, for a period of six consecutive calendar months, and in all other cases for 18 consecutive calendar months.

The examination, which is partly oral, clinical, and practical, covers a wide range, and the pupils who have an intelligent grasp of the prescribed subjects, and have passed the First Examination of the Central Midwives Board, would appear to have a sound knowledge of their duties in relation to the care of maternity patients. "A Certificate, to be known as the First Certificate . . . shall be awarded to each candidate successful at the First Examination whose first period of training has extended over six consecutive calendar months in accordance with the terms of Rule B. 11. The entry of a pupil's name on such record, or the award of such First Certificate, shall not entitle a pupil to admission to the Roll of Midwives, or authorise her to hold herself out to be certified under the Midwives Acts, 1902-1936." As, however, the Midwives Act, 1936, expressly permits nurses registered in the General Part of the Register of Nurses required to be kept under the Nurses' Registration Act, 1919, to receive remuneration for attending as a nurse on a woman in childbirth, or at any time during the ten days (presumably now 14 days) immediately after childbirth, the Certificate awarded her by the Central Midwives Board is evidence that she has received systematic training in the duties of a midwife, in addition to those of a State Registered Nurse.

It would appear that such training would more properly come under the control of the General Nursing Councils, but it must be realised that the General Nursing Councils have failed to define a training of a maternity nurse, and the Central Midwives Board has now stepped in and done so, though as the Certificate does not entitle the pupil whose name is inscribed thereon to admission to the Roll of Midwives or authorise her to hold herself out as certified under the Midwives Acts, the position is somewhat anomalous, the authority of the Central Midwives Board being limited to regulating the practice of midwives.

It must, however, be gratefully realised by State Registered Nurses that the Central Midwives Board have appreciated the desirability of a double training for Midwives, and that, as the new Act comes into force, State Registered Nurses are the only persons other than State Certified Midwives (with certain exceptions) who may receive any remuneration for attending as a nurse on a woman in childbirth or at any time during the ten days immediately after childbirth, and any person infringing

this Regulation will be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten pounds.

A State Registered Nurse whose name is on the General part of the Register of Nurses required to be kept under the Nurses' Registration Act, 1919, may not book maternity cases except where a doctor is engaged.

The Central Midwives Board has given further evidence of its appreciation of the value of training as a nurse in connection with midwifery as Rule 28 of the Rules of Training and Examination provides that "Unless the Board otherwise determines in any particular case, a person shall not be approved as a teacher for the purpose of Rule B 13 (a) (i) unless she is a State Certified Midwife and also a general trained State Registered Nurse. This should do much to place the practice of midwifery in relation to the whole person of the patient in the right perspective.

In the case of the untrained woman who receives eighteen months' training under the Central Midwives Board, she does not receive a Certificate, but her name is entered on a list kept by the Central Midwives Board. As she may not nurse Maternity cases unless she is a State Registered Nurse, or a State Certified Midwife, it is imperative that she should receive the six months' further training, and after passing the second examination receive the Certificate which entitles her to admission to the Roll of State Certified Midwives.

As the State Registered Nurses who gain the First Certificate of the Central Midwives Board are not entitled to admission to the Roll of Midwives, or to hold themselves out as certified under the Midwives Acts, 1902-1936, it would appear more in order if this qualification were registered under the General Nursing Council rather than under the Central Midwives Board.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that during the eighteen years of its existence, the General Nursing Council for England and Wales and, so far as we know, neither of the other General Nursing Councils, have taken any steps to define a course of training in Maternity Nursing, or to provide facilities for this to be obtained.

We doubt, indeed, whether the General Nursing Council, which has never shown any interest in the subject of maternity nursing, possesses the expert knowledge to define such a Course, and it cannot therefore be wondered that, after eighteen years of inaction in this regard on the part of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, the Central Midwives Board has now stepped into the breach and established a very comprehensive and adequate course, but it is none the less to be deplored that the General Nursing Council has missed the opportunity of following on the lines adopted by the General Medical Council in medicine, and provided for the training of medical, surgical and obstetric nurses.

Incidentally, the question arises: to what authority is the State Registered Maternity Nurse, holding the First Certificate of the Central Midwives Board, responsible, in the event of any action of hers being called in question. The Central Midwives Board have no machinery with which to deal with her as she is not a State Certified Midwife, and, if the skill of the work of the Maternity Nurse is in question, it is doubtful whether the General Nursing Council, as at present constituted, possesses the knowledge which would give confidence in its decision on a point of this nature.

Several questions arise in connection with these new Rules and will doubtless, sooner or later, present themselves for solution.

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