

The Purpose of Contact.

A nurse's business is to make contacts with her patients or to put it differently to "get in touch with them." The purpose of "contact" is to help heal the body and the mind and, in a metaphorical sense, to reach the heart of the patient. There is a great deal in life that transcends science but does not contradict it. Science is only one way of reaching reality. Do not be like the modern girl who knows everything and understands nothing. The making of "contact" is sometimes called the human touch. This cannot be taught as is the science of nursing, but without it nursing is useless, as mere sympathy is useless without skill.

In every symptom and in every disease there is a psychological factor, in everything from a cut finger to a "broken heart." A symptom is not something that a patient has "got." A symptom is a reaction of the whole organism—body, soul and spirit—to the environment; environment is responsible for much. Long ago when the world was young, people used signs instead of language and in moments of stress we fall back again upon the sign language. Think of the metaphors we use to-day all referring to parts of the body—"A stab in the back," "A slap in the face," "The long arm of the law" and so on. Symptoms are just the body's attempt to tell you something—its sign language. The lecturer told how he had once, in setting an examination paper, asked the difference between a bodily and mental symptom and into which category of physiological and psychological diseases one would place dyspnoea, poly-uria, asthma, insomnia, etc? But all these arise, said he, from both physiological and psychological causes; they do not belong to one alone. It is quite possible to go wrong on the spiritual side. It is possible, too, to talk a lot of vague psychological jargon and ignore the physical side. Psychology is as relentlessly certain as mathematics but useless when the physical side is not taken into consideration.

The Personality of the Nurse.

In speaking of the personality of the nurse Dr. Yellowlees gave the warning that understanding does not imply sentimentality; sentimentality does no good. The personality of the nurse is an exceedingly important matter, you can only give what you have in you. Not every nurse is capable of apprehending the personality of the patient. "Sometimes," said the doctor, "I feel distracted between the personality of the patient and that of the nurse—like a kind of metaphorical meat between the other two layers of a sandwich. But there are worse things than being in the middle of a sandwich provided there is not too much mustard." (Laughter.)

It is no good complaining that one's personality is not noticed. A good personality is always noticed and always appreciated, it cannot be kept down. There is no more irritating thing than to work under a person who is purely mechanical and for those young people who must, there is only one reply—have patience and your turn will come. To come up against a person who can never make up his mind about anything constitutes another very real difficulty and the only way to help him is to encourage him to make a decision himself. What you are always means more, however, to your patient, in the last resort, than anything you can say or do, always provided of course that you know your work in its technicalities. The patient is in search of reality and often the only healing contact that a patient can have is through the nurse. Unless the nurse herself is a healthy personality she cannot help the patient much. There is nothing dramatic about this fact. In ordinary practice it simply means—be yourself. Nursing requires remorseless sincerity in facing up to ourselves. The three big factors in life are work, society and sex; as you go through life you are constantly up against questions

relating to these and if you are a well-balanced person you are going to be able to help people with them. Difficult patients are really those who are badly adjusted to reality. What they need is healthy contact with reality and often the nearest bit of reality that they have is you. Unless you are a real personality you are not able to give what you are but only what you have learnt. You've got to be your patient's bit of reality, you must go on being yourself and not copy other people. Each of us has a unique contribution to make to life and no one else can do this for us. We hear people speak of the "human touch," and it is an amazing mystery, this human touch. How many very common acts such as the shake of the hand, the stroke of the hand on the hair, the slap on the back can be imbued with many different meanings according to the method of their performance. What a volume could be written about the hands. If we think of the old laying on of hands did this not have its beginning in some need for the human touch? A big hospital might become nothing but a tireless machine. What keeps it from degenerating into this? The human touch, the touch that heals pain; but the scientific goods—the knowledge—must go along with it. There is about such a hospital this strange feeling that it has ministered to the sick for centuries, call it what you like, this feeling, the genius loci, the spirit of the place, or simply the "human touch" or tradition of service. Can we admit that the core and centre of what we call the human touch may be something that transcends humanity itself, that enables us to give up analysing and admit that somewhere, somehow the human and the divine may be united? Let us remember the most manly prayer of all when we think of all that might be said about the hands, "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

RAMBLERS' CLUB.

BLUE-BELL RAMBLE VISIT TO WATLINGTON HOSPITAL.

The Blue-Bell Ramble on May 3rd broke the record of these expeditions which we have made for the last 17 summers as, for the first time, we started off in the rain. Towards the end of the day the clerk of the weather redeemed somewhat his conduct towards us, and there is a certain spirit of camaraderie and joyousness in these summer rambles of which even a wet day cannot rob us. We followed the river by way of Windsor, Maidenhead, Henley and Oxford to Watlington Hospital, where we had been invited to take tea by Miss Dickson, R.R.C. We received there the most delightful hospitality and went over the hospital and its beautiful and spacious grounds. In the sitting-rooms was a great profusion of lovely flowers which, Miss Dickson told us, had been sent in with the proviso that they be given to the nurses; next day the Club was glorious in its wealth of Spring flowers and wild apple and cherry blossom.

We left the hospital as in a kind of triumphal procession, for the Matron and the Inspector of Midwives for the District led off in their car to the blue-bell woods, and we followed through many a mile of them with their masses of blue-bells scattered like patches of low-lying mists over the dead leaves of autumn. At last we reached the broad highway again when our escort left us, and we found our way home by way of the lovely Burnham Beeches, Beaconsfield and High Wycombe.

Some members have asked us to arrange a ramble to the New Forest in June, and we shall be glad to hear from those who would like to join it.

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