

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NURSES OF GREAT BRITAIN.

THE NURSING CONFERENCE,
Caxton Hall, S.W.1., November 10th, 1938.

THE VALUE OF THE STATE EXAMINATION.

MISS HELEN DEY, O.B.E., R.R.C., presided.

MISS A. E. MERRY then read the following paper on "The Value of the State Examination"—

It is with considerable diffidence that I approach this subject.

There are they, I am sure, who have grave doubts as to whether any benefits have accrued from the State Examinations at all.

I think, however, that upon reflection it will be agreed that these examinations have already played a most important part in establishing the nursing profession in this country upon a firm basis as a profession.

The standard set by the State Examination is of necessity a minimum one—the General Nursing Council is a statutory body with limited powers defined by Act of Parliament—it is not concerned with professional ideals and ideal standards, but merely with setting a minimum of professional knowledge and experience below which it is not possible to recognise a person as a qualified nurse. It is for our own professional associations and for this National Council of ours, representing as it does the opinion of all branches of the profession, to state clearly what the ideal should be towards which we must strive.

The State Examinations have only been in existence since 1924—a mere 14 years—but in this time we have seen vast improvement in the equipment and staffing of the various hospital training schools throughout the country, with greatly improved facilities for teaching and study. The general standard of training in many hospitals has been improved, although there still remains much to be done in this direction.

Before a hospital training school can be recognised by the General Nursing Council it has to comply with certain standards as to—

- (1) The type and number of services it can offer.
- (2) The number of beds available.
- (3) The efficient equipping of classrooms.
- (4) The provision of a teaching staff.
- (5) Properly organised course of lectures.

This has resulted in hundreds of hospitals up and down the country improving their services and providing an organised system of teaching for their probationers where no such efforts were taken, before the advent of State Registration. This has been of great value, not only to the nursing profession, but to the public in providing more efficient hospital services.

The appointment of Matrons and Sister Tutors and members of the medical profession as examiners to the General Nursing Council has resulted in a continual interchange of ideas and experiences between those taking part in these examinations. On their visits to various centres of examination they have a unique opportunity of seeing what other hospitals than their own are doing, and this tends to produce a broader professional outlook and a more ready acceptance of new ideas and methods—the whole outlook becomes less static and that is all to the good.

As a result of the improved training and the gradual improvement in the standard of nursing in the properly organised schools, the general public and the medical profession are slowly learning to recognise the State Registered Nurse as a qualified professional woman.

The education of the public is a very slow process—but when one reflects that the State Examination is only

14 years old as yet—only in its early adolescence, as it were—I think we must acknowledge that the child is a very promising one and the results we have so far attained fully justify the faith of those who laboured so long and arduously in its creation.

A More Comprehensive General Training.

In considering the problems of nursing education in the light of the ultimate value of the nurse in her service to the public we must ask ourselves: What is it that the public will require of us as general trained nurses? When we speak of a general trained nurse, what do we mean?

We think of her serving in various rôles:—

In Hospital—as Staff Nurse, Ward Sister or Administrator.

As a Private Nurse—in Nursing Homes and homes of the public.

As a District Nurse.

As a Public Health Nurse—either combined with her work as a District Nurse or as a more specialised Health Visitor.

In Industry—as Welfare Nurse in factories or other places of work.

In the various Government Services—Army, Navy, Air Force, etc.

In Foreign Service—with its wide range of experience—in civilised and uncivilised areas, where there is much need of a pioneer spirit.

In short—in order to be ready efficiently to serve the public in the many fields into which she may be called, it would seem necessary for her to have a very broad and comprehensive training and not only theoretical knowledge but actual practical experience during training in the care of these conditions, which the public has a right to expect her to be able skilfully to deal with.

Now we come to the question: Are we as a profession satisfied with the results of the present system of training? Some of our General Hospitals, I know, are turning out magnificent professional women, with a good range of experience, well equipped to take over any kind of work which comes within the scope of general nursing, but what of a large proportion of the candidates who present themselves for Final Examination?

I think we are bound to confess that in our experience as Practical Examiners, or from those of us who have had occasion to employ the average product of these training schools, there is a lamentable number who confess to lack of actual experience in many branches of general nursing work.

Some hospitals appear to provide a disproportionate amount of surgical work.

Some—almost entirely medical and very little surgical in proportion.

A great many candidates—no theatre experience at all. Example: Surgical exam., 14 candidates, 2 with theatre experience.

Some—very little (if any) experience in nursing of infants and children.

Very few—any experience of infectious diseases.

Many—no experience of Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat diseases.

I think some of us will have met at some time or other the State Registered Nurse who has little or no knowledge of Gynæcological work or who has not even passed a catheter.

The State Examination has been very helpful in many respects in raising the standard of teaching in the Training Schools, but real skill for many nursing procedures cannot be tested in the short time available in the Examination Room, and some minimum time spent in the various important services should surely be demanded of the candidate for registration as a General Trained Nurse.

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