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EDITORIAL.

SHORTAGE OF NURSING STAFFS IN SANATORIA.

Until the tubercle bacillus was discovered and became common property, we of the last century brought up in the country would see a girl with a lovely bloom one day fade away the next. Her disease was commonly known as "galloping consumption," and indeed there would appear to have been no known remedy for the disease. Then medical science opened windows, let in fresh air, and prescribed more nourishing food. Quite simple remedies but difficult of application by the poor huddled in tenements.

The past half-century has seen tuberculosis tackled with marvellous success in sanatoria, and skilled nursing has been one of the primary aids in its treatment; so much so, that the demand for skilled nurses in these scientific institutions has been ever on the increase, and now the demand exceeds the supply.

Tuberculosis Increase.

We note that the increase of pulmonary tuberculosis was recently brought up in the House of Commons by Mr. Messer, Labour Member for Tottenham, who asked the Minister of Health: "What has been the percentage increase in pulmonary tuberculosis during the war; in what age-groups the increase is most marked; and if it is proposed to take any special steps to deal with this problem?"

To which question the Minister replied: "On the basis of provisional mortality figures for the years 1939 and 1940, the rate in England and Wales for the population as a whole was 9.7 per cent. higher than in 1939, the highest rate being 15 per cent. among women between the ages of 15 and 25. In the first quarter of 1941 there was, however, a reduction of 7 per cent. for the population as a whole, and of 4 per cent. for women between the ages of 15 and 25. With the co-operation of the Medical Research Council I have arranged for an expert investigation into the possible causes of increase. Everything possible is being done to maintain the tuberculosis service."

It is with the last sentence of the Minister's reply that the nursing profession is most intimately concerned. Is everything possible being done to maintain a high standard of nursing skill in sanatoria? We doubt it. What special facilities have been organised to induce suitable nurses to add experience in this most interesting and valuable specialty to their equipment? We know of none. But why not? There would appear to be a wide arena in which women could attain special knowledge of really national value in the treatment and cure of a devastating disease. Why not inducements?

Lectures, scholarships, financial and honourable awards. Emulation is human and, after all, few of us are altruists.

It is well known that there is a shortage of nursing staffs for the hospital services in this country and we are informed at the Ministry of Health that the shortage is serious in sanatoria, more particularly in those which treat patients suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis. Complete figures illustrating the shortage are not available. This is because a large number of sanatoria have sections which are included in the Emergency Hospital Scheme, and separate figures for the different sections are not available. Excluding these E.H.S. hospitals, the figures show that the nursing staff employed whole time in sanatoria at the present time numbers roughly 2,500. This is about 650 short of establishment, *i.e.*, there is a deficiency of 20 per cent. The trained nursing staff amount to 900 out of the 2,500 and 160 are required to bring their numbers up to establishment, *i.e.*, there is a deficiency of 15 per cent. In some parts of the country the proportionate deficiency is substantially greater, and in the country as a whole, if E.H.S. hospitals were included, the total figures would be very much higher.

The effect of these shortages is twofold:

1. In many sanatoria the nursing staff is being overworked, with the result that they cannot give to each patient the individual care that he needs.

2. In some sanatoria the shortage is so acute that it has been found necessary to close down some of the wards. There is an increasing waiting list of patients who need sanatorium treatment, and the position is being aggravated by the closing down of wards. If more nurses could be secured, not only could the wards which have been closed down be opened, but in some parts of the country additional accommodation could be made available.

One of the reasons why more nurses are not prepared to undertake nursing in a sanatorium may be that they do not always recognise that this is as vital a form of national service as any other type of nursing. The nurse who looks after the patient suffering from tuberculosis is acting in her country's best interests, and should realise that the care of her patient and the prevention of the spread of this disease is just as important a form of national service as nursing the service sick or wounded or the air raid casualty.

The Best Type of Nursing.

It is not always appreciated that sanatoria are generally situated in open surroundings, that they are built to admit the maximum of sunlight and air, that special attention is given to the welfare of the staff, and that every precaution is taken in the interests of

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