

THE FUTURE OF NURSING EDUCATION.

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The professional services rendered by physicians and nurses are essential social services. They must be closely integrated with contemporary social conditions and very sensitive to social change.

One does not have to be a prophet to advance the opinion that great social changes have taken place in this country and that still more fundamental changes lie immediately before us. From this it seems to me to follow that unless the professions of medicine and nursing so plan their educational offerings as to keep at least in step with social change they are likely to fail the country in the time of its greatest need.

The present day nursing education with the three-year hospital course leading to a R.N. is essentially patterned upon the status of medical practice during the last 25 years. In the earlier days of the training schools for nurses the graduates were trained for the private practice of nursing. Much of their time after graduation was spent in home nursing and, as compared with the present day, relatively little in hospital nursing except in administrative positions.

The rapid increase in the utilisation of hospitals, for both diagnosis and treatment, has enormously increased the demand for hospital graduate nursing, and with this has come a great decrease of the utilisation of nurses for home care. The present standard three-year course in nursing produces specialists essential to the modern practice of scientific medicine. In many respects these graduates are junior practitioners of medicine and invaluable assistants and associates of the physicians. Just as an increasing amount of the practice of medicine is carried on in and about hospitals, so an even greater amount of the practice of nursing is carried on in the same environment. There is no probability that this demand for hospital nurses will diminish; in fact, it is likely to increase, and thus the demand for women with this type of training must continue to be met.

But no one can have lived in close touch with our changing social conditions without having noted that there is clearly evident a change in the accent on medical practice with an increasing shift from diagnosis and treatment to prevention and positive health. We have come to realise that, though the diagnosis and treatment of illness is an essential requirement of medical practice, the maintenance of a healthy population and the use of the scientific possibilities that have been placed at our disposal will require of the medical profession, in the immediate future, thorough application of preventive medicine in all its ramifications, much more attention to nutrition and other sound principles of living and much more interest in positive health than has been the case in the past. This will constitute an enormous addition to the burden already carried by physicians and their associates and will obviously require a large increase in personnel.

At first sight it might seem as if this increase would have to be largely in the number of physicians and in their more satisfactory distribution. On the other hand, modern medical education requires a long and expensive training, and we shall be well advised to consider whether such an increase is either necessary or

desirable. Much of the work that will be added—I think, in the immediate future—will consist of the collecting of fact, the giving of instruction and general supervision of living conditions without which no sound programme of health can succeed. I am firmly of the opinion that much of this work can be done not only as well but better by women with an appropriate training. But I do not think that the present training, aimed as it is chiefly to produce experts in hospital nursing, will fill the bill.

What I have in mind will come under the general heading of public health nursing, though it will not, as I think, correspond accurately with the work now done by nurses trained in public health schools. The nurses, of whom there should be in my judgment a large number, should have a training much broader than is now given to the candidate for hospital nursing. It should be less special, should cover much more of the field of preventive medicine, provide much more familiarity with normal health, and it must provide a sound background in the understanding of social conditions. Such training cannot easily be articulated with the present standard course given in hospitals, which is still considerably on an apprentice basis.

The nurse who is to participate largely in the newer programmes of preventive medicine and positive health will have to know something more of the fundamentals of medical practice. She will have to be something approaching an expert on the problems of nutrition. She will have to know a great deal of the problems of social adjustment, of personality problems, of the methods of adjusting children—those newcomers into a strange world—to their environment, and she will have to be almost a capable practitioner of preventive medicine. Much of her time will probably be spent in the home of the patient studying the conditions, familiarising herself with the personalities of the family and advising as to how a meagre income may be made to supply a satisfactory environment for normal healthful living.

I have long believed that women are, on the whole, better suited than men to studying environment, giving the appropriate advice and feeling their way along deftly in complicated and varying conditions of environment. All these things used to be done in a simpler world by the general physician, but it is many years since the increasing burden placed upon the physician by modern science has made such a rôle for him possible. Moreover, our knowledge in all the fields broadly covered by the phrase "preventive medicine" has increased to such an extent that, with proper and detailed supervision, much disease can be permanently avoided and many conditions which are not properly described as disease, but which undermine health and diminish working capacity can be headed off and replaced by positive health. However, these things cannot be done by the personnel now available.

I make bold, therefore, to suggest that here is an essential field for which women with a sound training are peculiarly fitted. I would even go further and suggest that, unless some such development takes place, care of the health of the people that is thoroughly in step with modern scientific knowledge cannot be given.

Here, then, is the requirement not for the creation of

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