

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 2119. Vol. 93.

FEBRUARY, 1945.

Price Sevenpence.

EDITORIAL.

GRANTS TO MEDICAL SCHOOLS.

ADMISSION OF WOMAN STUDENTS.

When recently we read a written reply of the Minister of Health to the House of Commons on Grants to Medical Schools and Admission of Woman Students, we wondered how many Registered Nurses realised its significance.

Few, we fear.

Those of us who have carefully studied the Life of Dr. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson have not forgotten her decision. She began her professional career as a nurse, but as a member of a keen business family soon realised that no worldly goods would result from nursing the sick in those days, so she demanded entry to the Medical Profession, of which after a struggle she became a well-paid successful practitioner, and for the past ninety years women have, in considerable numbers, become medical practitioners, having largely to provide their own hospital environment owing to the fact that the leading medical schools have refused to admit women as medical students.

Mr. Willink, the Minister of Health, in a written reply relating to the report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Medical Schools, states that the committee have recommended a comprehensive programme for the reform and development of medical education and research. Certain of the matters involved would require legislation, and these the Government propose to discuss with the bodies concerned. Apart from these, the committee's recommendations are in the first place for the responsible educational authorities to study in framing their future policy, and the Government accordingly invite universities, medical schools, and teaching hospitals to give the report early consideration.

Recognising the fundamental importance of medical education and research to the future of the country's health services, the Government accept the principle of increased grants for the purposes of medical education and research to be distributed by the University Grants Committee through the universities to medical schools, post-graduate schools and institutes, and hospitals used for teaching and research. They also accept the suggestion that for a limited period these additional grants should be separated from the block grants received by universities for their work as a whole. The amounts of grant to be made from time to time, whether for capital or for recurrent expenditure, will be determined after consideration in the light of the recommendations of the University Grants Committee and the general financial position prevailing.

The Government share the views expressed in the report on the importance of affording to women equal opportunities to those enjoyed by men for medical training and for obtaining post-graduate experience. They have, therefore, decided, as recommended by the committee, that future payments of grant to medical schools should be conditional on the adoption by the school of the principle of admitting a reasonable proportion of students of both sexes. They recognise that schools at present open to one sex only may need periods of varying lengths to adjust their arrangements to a co-educational basis, and they therefore propose that the University Grants Committee in consultation with the university authorities concerned should be charged with the responsibility of determining from time to time whether the action taken by each of these schools complies with the principle to the extent that is reasonable.

The Government attach equal importance to the revision of the medical curriculum, and their acceptance of the principle of increased grants for medical education and research is dependent on the early completion of this process. They are, therefore, glad to learn that, as recommended by the committee, the General Medical Council has already taken the initiative in the matter.

The Nursing Profession, by failing to oppose the de-grading of its standard of efficiency won after years of conscientious struggle, is now face to face with a very serious position.

In the past, the work in hospital wards in the leading nursing schools was shared by nurse probationers and male medical students, and nothing could have been more harmonious than their relations.

As the advance of medical science demanded more and more study, nurse probationers within the last few years have been accorded the status of student nurses, and the new proposal that all hospitals qualifying for a grant must admit woman medical students means that the old duel, co-operation between medicine and nursing, will be subjected to a further test, and the organisation of nursing in the wards must be carefully defined, as the interference of woman medical students in practical details in connection with the patients might lead to disorganisation, and it is inevitable that the student nurse must take a subordinate position under the direction of the female medical staff.

There is another result to an influx of woman medical students in medical schools. Like the late Mrs. Garrett Anderson, keenly intelligent girls now entering hospitals as student nurses will naturally gravitate towards the higher grade and financial prospects available as medical students. Thus it is not improbable that the disastrous de-grading of the Nursing Profession in the 1943 Nurses Act will influence the type of student nurse we so

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)