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PRIVATE NURSING CONDITIONS

By EMMA ROBERTS

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WE do not labor to-day under the same difficulties in private nursing that we did a dozen years ago. The common consent of the people seems to be that nursing is one of the modern successful movements, and surely an educational project, such as this, should result in the uplifting of the profession. We are still trying to solve the problem of how to teach people the hygiene of healthful living. The masses are living in appalling unsanitary conditions.

A tubercular case comes to mind to which I was called, not many weeks ago, that made me heart-sick. Go with me, if you will, into one of the most deplorable of homes, where sanitation was unknown, and imagine the scene. The patient, a man of thirty-six, had been confined to his bed for eight months, almost entirely in an unkempt condition. Newspapers were spread about on the floor, and about three feet from the bed was an old bucket into which he was expected to expectorate. More often he missed it, and the sight that met my eyes made me gasp.

Needless to say, the patient, who had not had a bath in all this time, was transformed, put into as good a condition as could be, and the room cleaned of as much poison as possible. Fortunately the month was unusually warm for May, and he was encouraged to stay out of doors most of the six weeks of life which remained to him. In the absence of sputum cups, we cleansed a bucket and half filled it with earth; this was kept on a box level with the bed. When used, the sputum was covered over, and emptied, as often as need be, in a trench dug for all excretions. The people were very poor, and the item of expense had to be considered.

It is not much wonder that nurses are wanting in this line of work. We have in our well-equipped hospitals all the tools with which to perfect our work, but in the homes we must demonstrate our practical teaching in the art of improvising. Sick room supplies are often sadly missing, also plentiful linen. It is quite a problem to make people see the need of fresh linen daily, which often means daily washing,—a serious objection. The tactful nurse who is trying to bring about health reform will have two sets of linen, using them alternately, airing one well while the other is in use, unless the case is infectious.

To employ "an ounce of prevention" is another helpful means. The use of newspapers is of great value, substituting them for the better protectives. Spread a newspaper under the patient before giving the bed pan, place one, also, just under the knees for an added precaution. While making the morning toilet, use one to protect the pillows. Papers may be made into obstetric pads.

The improvised operating room, which has often been described in the *JOURNAL*, makes great demands on our resources. The difficulty of substituting utensils and having them sterile, and of the actual preparation of the whole, no one but the nurse knows.

After an operation, if one has no pus basin, a shallow hand basin can be made useful for the evacuations of helpless patients, gently pressing down on the bed and holding in place, if need be.

Protection from draughts can be made by throwing a sheet over backs of chairs, or an improvised screen, by having a frame with material tacked on.

Labor may be saved by using the ordinary cotton roll purchased at the dry goods store. A pad placed beneath the hips of a helpless patient serves a good purpose.

On one occasion I was in need of a drinking tube; not having one, the druggist, a very ingenious individual, to my amazement sent a nipple, short glass tubing, and longer rubber tubing. We all enjoyed the joke, especially the patient, a boy of sixteen.

The nurse who can adjust herself to existing circumstances is fortunate, indeed, and has solved one of the great problems in private nursing. Many practical suggestions published in the *JOURNAL* have been helpful to me; they are always read with much interest. The steady upward movement of the nursing profession is one to be highly commended.

Men and women are taught to-day how to care for all economic animal life, but they are not taught as much as they should be about caring for themselves. A man who takes care of his residence is a wise man, but he who takes care of the physical house in which his life resides is wiser.

Popular education can do more to improve sanitary and hygienic conditions than any other force. When fathers teach their sons, and mothers teach their daughters, improvement of the race will speedily follow. An education that makes for clean bodies, clean hearts, clean morals, clean thought and clean life in every way will do more to conserve and uplift the race than anything else.—Chase S. Osborn, in *Public Health*.