

NURSES REGISTRATION ACT, MIDWIVES ACT, MATERNITY HOSPITALS, AND PRIVATE HOSPITALS.

The ASSISTANT INSPECTOR OF HOSPITALS and DEPUTY REGISTRAR OF NURSES to the INSPECTOR-
GENERAL OF HOSPITALS and CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER.

SIR,—

I have the honour to report on the Nurses Registration Act, 1908; the Midwives Act, 1908; and Part III, Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Act, 1908.

During the last few years the number of candidates for the Nurses' Examination has greatly increased, the number in 1913-14 being 191, and in 1918-19 being 288. This is greatly due to the increased accommodation at the various district hospitals, necessitated by the return of sick and wounded men from active service, the policy of the Government having hitherto been to send these men for treatment to the general hospitals of their own districts rather than to special military hospitals.

The hospital authorities have greatly complained of the shortage of senior qualified nurses fitted to take charge of important wards and to train the juniors, and it may be that the probationers in training during the years of the war have not had the same advantages in this respect as previously. The senior sisters being constantly called up for military service have left gaps to be filled by nurses only recently qualified and without experience in teaching. As the best were needed for the care of the sick and wounded this was inevitable, but now that these seniors are returning it is for the Hospital Boards to secure their services and to adequately recompense them.

Hospital Boards have approached the Department with requests for a uniform scale of salaries to be drawn up, so that one hospital may not be under disadvantages as against others. The question of salaries may well be considered, but should only be at the upper end of the scale. Probationers who are receiving a valuable training should receive merely pocket-money, but their teaching, for which, and not for pay, they give their services, should be brought up to a uniform high standard. To do this Boards must realize it is their duty to properly pay the teachers and so make it worth the while of those who are paid for this work to specialize in it.

The whole burden of teaching and lecturing should not be left to a busy Medical Superintendent, the honorary physicians and surgeons at the larger hospitals, or to the junior house surgeons, who do not fully understand what is required, and to the busy Matron and ward sisters. Special lecturers in the various subjects contained in the syllabus issued under the Nurses Registration Act should be engaged and paid, so that in addition to what teaching is given by the Matron in her lectures, and by the sisters in the practical work of the wards and theatres, the pupils may have the full attention of one senior sister specially engaged as a tutor sister, whose duty would be to supervise the probationers' work, examine them periodically, and take in hand any who need individual training.

The demobilization of the Army Nursing Service is now going on, and there will be many experienced nurses not required for the permanent service available for hospital work who could well fill such posts. One sister has already been appointed by the Dunedin Hospital as surgical tutor, and the result of her work will be awaited with interest.

The provision of nursing assistance for country districts has been a very acute difficulty. It is proposed that the Department should retain a number of nurses for Public Health service, and among these some who can be sent to fill positions in the country, for which it is frequently very difficult for the local committees to secure nurses.

The late epidemic of influenza occurred at a very unfortunate time for the Dominion on account of the large number of nurses, over 500, then still away on active service. Those nurses who were themselves not ill did splendid service, but, unfortunately, very few did not contract the infection within a short time. The hospital staffs suffered greatly, quite three-quarters of the total number of nursing staff being off duty together, either acutely ill or convalescing. The death roll among trained nurses and probationers as well as among doctors was heavy. Had it not been for the services of voluntary helpers, both men and women, boys and girls, who came from offices and shops, colleges and schools, as well as from private homes, and did what they could, the sick would have lain almost unattended. The number of trained nurses available was not more than one to fifty or sixty patients. Too high commendation cannot be given to those who took up this unaccustomed work and laboured night and day to do their best to relieve the terrible suffering. The large camps near Wellington were very heavily visited, and the death rolls were large. One military sister died, and others were dangerously ill.

Since the cessation of the epidemic and with the possibility of a recrudescence there has been a movement to spread as widely as possible some knowledge of elementary nursing. The ignorance of the simplest measures of caring for the sick was rather astonishing in consideration of the general adaptability and efficiency in domestic work of the colonial woman. Few persons could correctly read a thermometer, but, after all, as this little instrument is not a household possession this is not surprising. Some of the hospitals have offered to take in young women for short periods of training in the wards. The advantage of this to these women is questionable, and the disadvantage to the regular probationers is unquestionable. The Department could not countenance the practice in the training-schools except during the time that a recurrence of the epidemic may still be looked for. Rather is it desired that the course given by the St. John Ambulance Society should be extended to a larger number of people, and that centres should be formed and classes held in every town in the Dominion. To further this object the Department has appointed nurses, who will be sent at the request of any centre forming a class, to give practical demonstrations of,