

On Caring for Patients—(2)

I do hope that you have been thinking over and trying to put into practice a little of what was written in the December issue. The nurse is of course, concerned first with the care of the body of the patient but the mind and soul of the patient have a greater influence on the body than we sometimes appreciate. If a patient is happy and at peace, the chances of recovery are the more greatly enhanced. That is why a good hospital is a happy hospital and a good nursing staff is always known not only for its efficiency, but also for its happy friendliness which means so much to these patients who are under its care.

Remember the story with which the previous column began. The patients gave up attending the new hospital, despite all its fine and up-to-date equipment, because neither the doctors nor the nurses paid any attention to the feeling of their patients. In other words, they had forgotten the most important thing of all, namely that patients are people, with feelings and a self-respect that must always be taken into account. What does it mean? It means that not only are you bound to avoid making the cardinal error of treating your patients as impersonal objects rather than the human beings that they are, but also to take every opportunity of befriending them and of helping to build up their self-respect, as and when the opportunity occurs. Some years ago I read a book of letters written by a professor to his students. They are full of good things. Amongst them I remember how he counselled one of his friends thus: To understand anyone you must be their friend". "Well, there it is for you all. If you are to help your patients you must understand

them; and if you are to understand them, you must be their friend. You will then be able to judge and appreciate them from the inside, to see why and how they do what they do; all their actions which seemed so crude and ignorant before are seen in their proper perspective. Once you have won the confidence of those you nurse, then the door is wide open for the kind word of advice; the suggestion of a better and cleaner way of doing things; the avoidance of those countless little misunderstandings that have caused so much difficulty in the past.

Now, that there are certain difficulties and even dangers for the nurse in following such a course of action in a country like ours. I would not deny. Many of the patients in our hospitals are not only unlettered, but they are bound to traditions and patterns of thought and behaviour that they have come to them unimpaired through countless centuries. It is not usual for them to find that their bodily needs are being attended to by a woman other than their wives. Care and discretion must obviously be exercised in all that it is said and done, but even so, very much still remains. How splendid it would be if it could be said that from your hospital emerged patients both cured of their physical ailments and also stronger in mind and in spirit than when they were admitted!

Then a word or two about the relations and friends of the patients. What about them? We all know how difficult they can be and how we so often dread the time of the day when visiting time draws near. Of course, generally they are indeed worried and upset. Not only are they concerned about the loved one lying in the ward, but often they

have had to make a long and tiresome journey which they can ill-afford in order to be there at all. The surroundings are strange and unfamiliar, so, often they are afraid; afraid for the one lying on the cot and, although this may be rarely admitted, afraid for themselves also; to them a nurse is a new and unfamiliar person and it takes time for simple and unlettered people to adjust themselves to such a situation. But what of you? How do you respond, authoritative, unsympathetic, or just merely callous of their feelings? I do hope that it is not thus. Visiting time is a great opportunity for the careful and thoughtful nurse. The visits of relations and friends play an important part in the well-being of the patient. If you are careful to be kind, sympathetic and homely in your dealings with these worried and anxious people, then a bond of confidence will be forged between you which cannot but be of good for the patient who is the object of your mutual concern. They have access to the pattern of thought and feeling of which you may be totally unaware and if you enjoy the confidence of the friends, then very often they can be of the utmost help to you in persuading the patient to submit to the discipline of his or her treatment.

Please think about these things. Think of the place where you are ministering. What is being done there along these lines? What are you doing to help? Some of you are holding positions of great and important responsibility. Are you using your opportunities of influence and direction with such ideals in mind? Do you gently and constantly remind by word and example your student nurses of the real importance of a good and friendly nurse-patient relation link? Then at the end, but most important of all, do you pray for your patients and their relations, especially for those who worry you most?

Remember that to understand you must befriend; to befriend, you must pray.

God bless you.

—Rev. I.C. Weathrall