

Mainly for Student Nurses

Nostrums, Ancient and Modern

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Fillet of a Fenny Snake
In the Cauldron boil and bake,
Eye of newt and toe of frog
Wool of bat and tongue of dog.
(*Macbeth*)

Among the nurse's manifold activities is included the most important duty of the administration of medicines. The 'Materia Medica' that go to make up the present great range of drugs in the Pharmacopoeia are nearly all derived from the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, and a few are made artificially. While some, mainly herbal, have a history of very ancient use, others have only recently been discovered, usually as a result of patient and painstaking research over many years by our Scientists working in response to long-felt needs, for diseases previously considered incurable.

If the nurse takes the trouble to find out about the action of the drugs in the medicines she is giving, a very interesting field of knowledge with limitless scope opens up before her. The more she knows, the deeper she will want to delve into this engrossing subject.

In the earliest known records of drugs, mention is made of opium, mustard, dill, caraway, squill and gum acacia, all still in constant demand. These ancient writings tell us that most drugs supported charms, and in many amusing prescriptions herbal drugs have been identified, which were administered with ceremonial incantations, that were probably most effective in subduing the mind as well as curing the body of the sufferer.

From the Egyptian Papyrus Ebers, which is so informative on early medicine, comes the following:—

'A true remedy proved millions of times to prevent lashes pricking the eye:—

Frankincense	...	1
Lizard's blood	...	1
Bat's blood	...	1

Clip lashes and apply till well.'

Also is recorded:—

'To prevent diseases the Egyptians treat their bodies with clysters and emetics and fasting, sometimes every third day, sometimes for every three successive days, once a month. For they are persuaded the worst thing is to exceed the nourishment digested by the body, and from such excess comes the beginnings of all diseases.'

A mixture of therapeutic knowledge and magic is shown in the following:—

'If a man's head be full of scabies and itch, thou shalt bray sulphur, mix it in cedar oil, and anoint him. As thou tiest thou shalt recite the charm. Double it twice, tie seven knots, bind on his brow, and he shall recover.'

The monks of the early Christian Church were largely responsible for the preservation of knowledge of the uses drugs were put to, for they carefully compiled records. Hildegard, Abbess of Binden, at the beginning of the twelfth century left us one of the first systematically listed herbal remedies in a book of natural history called 'Physica.'

From all parts of plants come many of our most used drugs, called in olden days 'Simples,' such as the following:—

From leaves is obtained Digitalis, which has always been used as a most efficient regulator of faulty heart's action. It is obtained from the dried purple foxgloves

leaves. *Atropa Belladonna*, the Deadly Nightshade, that pretty little purple flower found in the hedges, contains a much used drug in its leaves, for *Belladonna* relieves pain and spasm, and the derivative, *Atropine*, we use as a reliable means of diminishing respiratory secretions; also as eye drops.

Seeds are put to a number of uses. The dried stramonium seed yields an extract of value to asthmatics. Linseed is used whole in poultices and also crushed to obtain the oil. *Senna*, an Indian plant, gives us one of the less unpleasant aperients when its pods are infused and imbibed. Other seeds used are those of anise, *strophanthus*, and *Nux Vomica*, from which comes strychnine. The most outstanding tree bark in use is that of the *Cinchona*, yielding quinine; this was until recently obtainable only from South America, but is now successfully grown near Darjeeling. *Cascara*, one of the contents of the mysterious hospital 'Black Draught', also comes from the bark of a tree. Some flowers provide drugs, such as the yellow *santonin*, one of the oldest remedies for worms.

Roots have many uses, among their yield being aconite, a useful analgesic, liquorice, gentian, *ipecacuanha*, and *Jalap*. Opium, with its alkaloid morphia and many other preparations, comes from the sap of the white poppy.

Drugs of animal origin are mainly glandular extractives, examples in frequent use being, Pituitrin, Adrenalin, and Insulin. From the digestive glands of animals comes Pepsin, and *Ventriculin*. In many cases the demands for drugs originally obtained from natural sources, far exceeds the supply, which is now met by manufacturing them synthetically; such a one is Adrenalin. Vitamins, those minute compounds present in natural foods, that have of recent years brought the Dietician into his own, are also made synthetically, and the demand is enormous in England, since the war has limited the supply of dairy and farm produce.

Lots of medicines have as their chief ingredient minerals, used to make up for diet deficiencies, such as, iron, copper, calcium, sodium, potassium, and others are useful to cure certain diseases, bismuth, ammonium, magnesium and mercury, and nowadays gold is also being used to help the rheumatic patient.

In the middle of the nineteenth century three outstanding discoveries were made, which when linked together, as they quickly were, caused the practice of Surgery to progress in enormous strides, paving the way for Aseptic surgery as we know it to-day. These were the following:—Louis Pasteur, a French chemist, made public his experiments proving many diseases to be caused by minute life now known as germs. Lord Lister, an eminent London surgeon, applying Pasteur's theories, established Antiseptic surgery, mainly with the use of carbolic acid, and last but by no means least, Morton, an American dentist, and Simpson, a doctor in Scotland, both in the year 1846, were successful in inventing anaesthetics. Prior to this time, alcohol and opium were largely used to stupefy the victim for operation and the patient's chances were indeed small, for shock to the nervous system was one of the greatest hazards to be encountered, and if the patient surmounted this obstacle, he was still faced with the horrors of sepsis to come.

Now, with the patient comfortably drugged and snoring, sepsis combated with knowledge, surgery has at last entered a wide and comparatively safe field.

Coming to present times, one of the most outstanding discoveries was that of Insulin, in 1922 by Doctors Banting and Best of Canada, thus giving the Diabetic a new lease of life. The most recent and revolutionary drugs to be invented after years of research are the group of preparations that form the Sulphanilamides and *Prontosil* known collectively as Chemotherapy, these being soluble forms of sulphur that disinfect the blood stream of the various virulent cocci infections. Outstandingly, their use in the treatment of Pneumonia and Child-bed fever has greatly reduced the mortality of these diseases.

(Recipe).—Most prescriptions have a principal ingredient, to which may be added another to enhance its effect, and a third to counteract any undesirable effects of the first two, all in a palatable coloured medium.

Some people react to certain drugs differently to others, or much more rapidly, and this is called having an idiosyncrasy or in the second case being intolerant. Intolerance may occur after one or two doses, and may show by rapid pulse, flushing, vomiting etc., and the medicine should not be repeated without the doctor's approval. It must be remembered also that some drugs accumulate in the system if given over a protracted period, and signs of poisoning may occur. Digitalis is one of the chief offenders in this respect.

On the other hand, all night nurses are acquainted with the patient who is so tolerant that he "can't possibly sleep" without his nightly injection.

The Dangerous Drugs Act regulates the sale and use of poisons chiefly opium, morphia, cocaine and their derivatives. Such drugs must be kept locked in a special poison cupboard, and the key always on the person of the Sister of the Ward. All doses must be written up by the doctor and checked by a second nurse before giving to the patient and careful record kept of each dose. All other medicines should be kept in a cupboard of their own, never with applications for external use, so that no unfortunate mistakes can occur.

Nostrums, to refer to the title of this article, always implies to my mind nauseous draughts swallowed under protest. Nowadays the word has come to mean quack or patent medicines. It is an abbreviation from the name of a French physician, Nostradamus (1503-1566). He was very renowned for his medicines and when plague swept through France, became famous for his many cures. Unfortunately, he was unable to save his own wife and children and after their deaths his failure sent him wandering, till later he settled down in an abbey, turned astrologer, and it is for his remarkably accurate prophecies that he is now remembered.

THE TRAINED NURSES ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

The Trained Nurses' Association of India is threatened with ruin for need of Funds. Therefore the help of the Nurses it represents and for whom it has done so much, is still urgently needed.

If the T. N. A. I. should cease to exist or its activities become cramped for lack of funds, nurses will have no representative association to fight for the rights of their profession, and all the privileges gained by hard work during the last 34 years will be lost.

There will be a very difficult period after the war and unless members are active in helping their Association to help them, there is great danger that their salaries will be unfairly reduced, that all nursing conditions will deteriorate, that the progress for which we are working will never be gained and that their prospects will be badly affected by partly trained nurses.

A noble effort has been made in raising Rs. 2,047-14-6, but Rs. 2,952-1-6 is still needed, at once, if we are to raise the Rs. 5,000 which is ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, to cover our deficit for the year ending September 30th, 1942, and we shall also need many well filled conference purses to tide us over 1943.

THERE ARE ONLY A FEW WEEKS LEFT. A GIGANTIC EFFORT IS NEEDED IF DISASTER IS TO BE AVOIDED.

WE HAVE MADE A GENEROUS DONATION TO THE WAR FUND IN GIVING THREE AMBULANCES. BECAUSE WE HAVE DONE THIS, ARE WE TO SEE THE TRAINED NURSES' ASSOCIATION OF INDIA SUFFER?

In supporting the Trained Nurses' Association of India you are **HELPING YOURSELVES, YOUR PROFESSION, YOUR COUNTRY, AND THE WAR EFFORT.**