

MALE NURSING IN THE ROYAL NAVY

At the Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar, England

'This is supposed to be the largest brick building in the world,' is sure to be one of the first pieces of information which the visitor to the Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar, receives. It is a distinction of which Haslar is proud, and not without cause, for the construction of this very colossus among brick buildings took place some two hundred years ago. The dignity of age and beauty thus combines with mere dimension to produce a noble whole.

Passing through a handsome iron gateway I found myself in a formal garden of wallflower beds and grass verges, with the administrative section of the hospital in front of me and the naval officers' residences on either side. An archway through the administrative block gave a view of another large rectangular garden bright with flowers, at the far end of which I saw the church which, in keeping with all the other brick buildings on the site, is of red brick. The hospital wards and special units flank the garden on either side for a length of three or four hundred yards.

A Sea Service. In the nursing sisters' quarters—which are in a separate building in the grounds—I was greeted by Miss Martin, the matron-in-chief of Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service, who has her headquarters there, and Miss Beal, the matron of Haslar. Together they gave me a brief outline of the naval male nursing service.

'Accepted candidates between the ages of 18-25 are entered as probationers, and are given a course of instruction,' Miss Martin told me, 'and serve for the first year in the wards as probationer sick-berth attendants, being instructed in the work of the sick-berth attendants, and performing the simpler duties under the supervision of the instructing sister and the petty officer, or leading sick-berth attendants. They spend a certain amount of time in the dispensary, for dispensing is a compulsory subject. You see,' she went on, 'we are essentially a sea service, and afloat they have to do all the dispensing that is required. All the shore training is designed to equip the men to serve in ships' hospitals.'

In addition, the probationers attend classes under the instructing medical officer and the instructing sister, and are taught to swim, after they have had preliminary physical training and parade work in the naval barracks, where they are expected to absorb into their mental make up the 'Service' atmosphere.

'And at the end of the first year?' I asked.

'If they pass their examinations, they pass out as sick-berth attendants, a rating which is equivalent to able-seamen in other branches of the service.'

'Is that the end of their training, then?'

'Oh, no! They remain under instruction as well as undertaking more advanced nursing duties, and prepare for the next examination, which they must take before they can be rated leading sick-berth attendants. That generally takes another eighteen months to two years, but promotion to leading rating does not follow immediately upon that examination. A man may have to wait for some years, and in any case two years' service afloat is a necessary preliminary. Again, you see, it is essentially a sea-service.'

At that point we were joined by the commissioned ward master. To him Miss Martin mapped out a tour of the hospital, and with Miss Beal and an instructional sick-berth petty officer we set off, programme in hand. The round took us over two hours, although we missed several of the wards and offices.

Our first visit was to the tubercular ward, where the patients enjoy the amenities of a long verandah with a south aspect. The staff work in this ward for only a short period at a time, three months at the most, and all undergo an X-ray examination first followed by a general medical examination on leaving the ward. Probationers do not come to this ward, as their time is devoted to the acute wards, and the many special departments of which they must gain experience. Next came the medical block, where we saw a convalescent ward, and the surgical block.

Each ward is under the control of a nursing sister. It has a petty officer or leading rating, approximating very much to the staff nurse in a civilian hospital. Then come the sick-berth attendants and the probationers, and there may also be V.A.D.s doing their annual week of hospital training.

The Personnel. The commissioned ward master explained it in this way: 'The personnel consists of probationers and sick-berth attendants who work in the wards. Then there are the leading ratings who also work and supervise the work. The chief petty officers do administrative work, and so, of course, do those who reach commissioned rank. Those who specialise in particular subjects have a distinguishing badge—a circle with the initial of their subject—to wear on the right arm, and receive an extra 6d. a day on their pay. So there is a good deal of scope for recruits who are ambitious, and there is room for them, too.'

'Enlistment is through the recruiting offices in the ordinary way, is it not?'

'Yes.'

'And what about pay?'

'Probationers receive 2s. a day, sick-berth attendants from about 3s. 3d. to 4s. 3d. a day, leading sick-berth attendants from 4s. 9d. to 5s. 6d., petty officers 6s. 9d. to 8s., and chief petty officers 9s. to 10s. 6d., all found.'

When They Specialise. 'What are the different subjects in which they can specialise?'

'They can become radiographers, masseurs, laboratory assistants, operating-room assistants.'

In most cases, I learnt, the special training consists of a six-months' course in the department concerned, followed by a qualifying examination, though the laboratory assistants must take two months at Greenwich. For the masseurs, however, the procedure is rather different, for, although there is a large department for massage and medical electricity, there is no school of massage at Haslar or, indeed, at any of the naval hospitals, that at Chatham having been closed down. The men, therefore, take a two-years' course in London, and enter for the examinations of the C.S.M.M.G.

'After taking such a long course, do you have more than the ordinary 6d. a day added on to your pay?' I asked the petty officer in charge of the massage department. He told me that they had the extra 6d. a day like the other 'specialists,' and explained that it was in reality no hardship.

'We used to have a shilling a day,' he said, 'but then we only had it when we were actually working as masseurs. Now we have 6d. a day extra always, whatever duties we may be doing, which comes to much the same thing, and has the advantage of being regular.'

'Massage departments are mainly at your shore stations, I suppose? Or do you go to sea as masseurs?'

'The ships do not all carry masseurs, but we generally go to the flag-ships and serve the squadron or flotilla from there.'

Operating-room assistants also perform a very useful service afloat, for ships' theatres are nowadays as well found as many on shore, and a number of operations, major as well as minor, are carried out at sea very successfully.

and there is now seldom any necessity to rush a man to the nearest port for operation—from the larger men-of-war at least. Even X-ray apparatus is carried in all ships, from light cruisers to capital ships. A good many naval radiographers take the necessary civil examination to become members of the Society of Radiographers, and thus have a profession to turn to when, in the early forties, their naval service comes to an end and they feel the need to augment their pensions.

There is a special employment bureau for ex-members of the Service attached to the Royal Naval Sick Berth Staff Association, whose secretary is Mr. W. Winsor, 273, Fawcett Road, Southsea. Certain posts about the hospital are filled by pensioners, such as the care of the 'service afloat stores,' where medical stores are received and issued to Haslar itself and to the naval hospitals overseas and ships whose depot Haslar is. The sick-berth staff having had considerable and varied experience in responsible positions are well qualified to fill vacancies in hospitals, clinics and institutions.

The staff of Haslar are particularly proud of their own quarters, a handsome building on the water front of Spithead. It was presented during the Great War by the women of Canada as 'an expression of our love and loyalty to our King and Empire, and gratitude to the brave men who are fighting for the vindication of our honour,' and was opened by Queen Mary in 1917. Here the men have their recreation rooms, complete with billiard tables, their gymnasium, their canteen, their dormitories (immaculately tidy) and their separate messes. A particularly cherished privilege pertains to the messes, for in each one the men select their own committee, appoint a caterer and stewards for the month, and thus have control of their own menus. The accounts are kept with great precision, and each month the summaries are slipped into a frame for all the world to see, showing clearly how much has been spent on different kinds of provisions, and which tradespeople have received the orders.

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MALE NURSING IN THE ARMY

The Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley, has a delightful situation on Southampton Water, with extensive grounds that run to the very shore. On velvet lawns dotted with clumps of rhododendrons and shaded by sweet-smelling pine trees are numerous seats where, on the day of my visit, convalescent soldiers were enjoying the sunshine and the view across the water to the Isle of Wight. Several had visitors with them.

From the enquiry desk I was directed down wide corridors to a general office, whence I was collected by the sergeant-major and conducted to his office. I explained my mission—to obtain information on nursing conditions for men in the Army, that is, in the Royal Army Medical Corps. After joining the Corps at a recruiting office and before being posted to a hospital, recruits, I learned, spend a few months at the depot receiving instruction in drill and in the technical duties of the Corps. This training consists of instruction in elementary anatomy and physiology, first aid, elementary nursing, bandaging, sanitation, gas training and so on. On arrival at Netley or other training establishment, they prepare for their first examination that qualifies for the title of nursing orderly Class III. The junior course lasts four months and is compulsory for all members, even those who aspire to be, not nurses, but clerks or hospital cooks in the Service. This means that the majority of men are nursing orderlies, Class III, after a year's service.