

Lectures on Gynæcological Nursing

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LECTURE I.

IT is a fact of general acceptance amongst the medical profession that the advances which have been made in the knowledge and treatment of the Diseases of Women during the past thirty years have been greater than in almost any other branch of medicine or surgery. Not only are diseases recognized and treated to-day upon scientific principles, the causes of which, a few years ago, were considered obscure, and the cure of which were considered hopeless, but, improvements are constantly being made as the knowledge of the causation or the pathology of these complaints increases.

Foremost amongst the methods of improved care must be reckoned the Nursing of these cases. Indeed, it is not too much to say that after many operations which are undertaken for the removal of tumours, for example, the after-success of the case depends upon the Nursing which the patient receives; and, with only one or two exceptions, it may also be said that the Nursing is more important in cases of abdominal operations than in any others. It is therefore becoming, to an increasing degree, important for Nurses to understand the methods which are employed in the care of patients afflicted with diseases peculiar to women. The reasons for, and the results which can be obtained through, the employment of such measures are, therefore, of such interest, that it has been urged upon the writer that a short course of lectures on this special matter might prove to be of practical usefulness.

The first essential for the Gynæcological Nurse to remember is that absolute cleanliness, important as it is in every branch of surgery, is imperative in this particular department of work. The vagina and uterus are so closely associated with lymphatic glands and large veins, and the power of absorption of poisons from their surfaces is so great that any slight abrasion of their epithelium may become the starting point of infection of the system. Puerperal fever, for example, one of the most fatal complaints to which women are liable, is induced, generally within a few days after labour, by the introduction of bacterial poison into the system of the patient.

In Gynæcological Nursing, the attendant speedily becomes impressed with the fact of the frequency of cases of pelvic inflammation—the extraordinary facility with which such inflammatory conditions are induced being due to the extreme vascularity

of the organs. For the same reason, recurrences after one attack of pelvic inflammation are extremely common, and the patient often becomes, unless great care is taken, more or less permanently “delicate” because of the rapidity with which any chill or cold will light up old inflammatory trouble. Consequently, next to cleanliness, the patient who is suffering from any disease of these organs requires careful protection from the possibility of catching cold, and the clothing of the skin, therefore, is a most important matter in the treatment or prevention of these complaints. “All-wool clothing,” in thickness according to the season, worn from the neck to the knees and to the wrists, is a good general rule for such patients, and there is no doubt that women owe an immense debt of gratitude to the Jaeger materials as the pioneers of a more rational system of clothing the skin.

The third essential in Gynæcological Nursing is the careful regulation of the intestines. In many cases loss of tone of the muscular system occurs, and the muscles of the abdomen and intestines suffering with others, more or less obstinate constipation is produced; and this has a trebly detrimental effect. It causes pressure upon the pelvic structures which are already damaged, and, therefore, increased pain results: it causes increased fulness of the pelvic vessels, and, therefore, an increased tendency to fresh inflammatory conditions; and it causes various forms of indigestion with the usual detriment to the general health and strength. It is, therefore, essential to notice carefully and at once report any constipation, to the doctor, and the facts to which attention has been called will explain the reasons why enemata are so frequently ordered, and why they have such excellent results in these cases. When an enema cannot be given for any reason, it is useful to remember that glycerine suppositories have very much the same effect.

To begin with local treatment, there are certain Instruments which it is necessary the Gynæcological Nurse should understand and be able to use with facility. All these can be employed without any appreciable pain to the patient, and, at the same time, it is a strange fact that in the majority of cases pain is caused by their use; from which the lesson is clear that experience and practice are, above all things, necessary in the acquisition of due dexterity.

The Speculum.—There is a great variety of specula in shapes, sizes and materials. Some, especially the older-fashioned ones, are made of steel on the principle of two blades jointed in the centre. Being introduced closed, the blades are made to diverge by moving the handles, and thus the surface of the vagina, or of the cervix uteri, is

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