

STRUGGLES IN THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT
OF NURSE TRAINING AT THE INFIRMARY IN GLOUCESTER

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The first training school for nurses founded by Florence Nightingale at St. Thomas's Hospital, London, had already been in existence for four years when Mr. Gambier-Parry made his proposal on December 8th, 1864 that the Weekly Board of the Gloucester Infirmary should consider "the admission into this hospital of young persons for the purpose of being trained as pupil nurses". Immediately the Board resolved "that the consideration of such a proposition be deferred to this day fortnight at 12.30 p.m. and that notice of this resolution be sent by the Clerk to each member of the Weekly Board". On December 29th 1864 the resolution was re-read and Mr. Parry then stated his views with regard to the proposed measure and moved the following resolution which was seconded by Mr. Lucy:

"that the Weekly Board accept the following proposal and that a sub-committee of this Board be appointed to consult with the Medical Board and report upon it, viz; that permission be given for the admission of pupil nurses in the wards of this Hospital subject to the following conditions:

They come from a recognised home properly supervised.

They shall be admitted by and be amenable to the authority of the Weekly Board.

They shall be designated Pupil Nurses.

They shall be at no cost to the Infirmary nor sleep nor have their meals there unless by special direction of any one of the Medical Officers.

Their attendance at fixed hours shall be obligatory.

They shall be regarded as auxiliaries to the permanent Nurses.

They shall be subject to the medical Officers, resident and non-resident, to the Chaplain and to the Matron in every particular and in the same degree as other servants and nurses in whatsoever concerns the duties and the authority of those officers as laid down in the Rules of the Infirmary now in force."

By the end of this meeting doubts were being raised about the very first of these conditions 'from a recognised home properly supervised' and after much discussion an amendment was finally adopted, "that pupil nurses shall not be introduced from any Institution that shall not have been

established by a Public Meeting of the inhabitants of the City and County of Gloucester (properly convened) and subject to public supervision". However, some of the Board were still not satisfied and it was proposed "that the resolution for the admission of pupil nurses be not acted upon until a special General Meeting of the Governors at large shall have been convened to consider and determine upon the question". But the proposal was rejected. At the normal General Quarterly Meeting on January 5th, 1865, further discussion of the Board's decision resulted in the following motion being carried:

"That in reference to the resolution as to pupil nurses passed at the Weekly Board Meeting of 29th December last, it be distinctly understood that the pupil nurses be admitted solely for the objects stated by the Promoters viz: to acquire a knowledge of nursing and to relieve and assist the regular nurses in the discharge of their duties but that any pupil nurse be liable to instant dismissal by the Weekly Board after proof of any kind of religious interference with the patients or other inmates of the Infirmary".

Herein lay the problem of starting training for nurses at the Infirmary at this time. The finances were very precarious and could not support the added cost of training nurses however ideal and necessary it was seen to be. The 'recognised home' in the original proposal was one of the many being founded by religious sisterhoods at this time and while supporters of the project saw it as a splendid source of pupil nurses at no cost to the Infirmary and bringing to it the standing that establishing a training for nurses would now ensure, those who opposed it saw it as a threat to Protestantism and as an infiltration of women with strong leanings towards the Catholic Church. They did not consider the conditions in the original proposal provided sufficient safeguard and all the fears that surrounded the development of Anglo-Catholicism in England entered into and added to the difficulties of establishing nurse training in Gloucester. Throughout January many of the Governors wrote letters published in the Gloucester Journal in support of, or in opposition to, the decision of the Weekly Board and the General Meeting and finally the Governors decided to call a special General Meeting on February 16th, 1865 because:

"We consider the Weekly Board to have exceeded its powers. The Resolution opens the wards of the hospital to pupil nurses from homes, private in character and subject to no public supervision whatever. The Resolution if acted upon will cause amongst the Governors and Subscribers an element of discord which must be most prejudicial to the administration and funds of the Institution".

This in spite of a letter of utter reason from the physicians and surgeons of the Infirmary published on January 21st:

"We the undersigned, being members of the medical staff who hailed with satisfaction the proposal that pupil nurses be admitted to the wards of the Infirmary believe that it is a duty to state at length the reasons that induce us to regard the same with complete and unanimous approval.

First as regards the Infirmary we have never stated, as reported, that the present nursing accommodation is inefficient. On the contrary, we believe that it is as good as the circumstances of the case admit, but we have said and we do say that it is insufficient. That so many duties extra to the proper duties of a nurse are required from each individual who holds that office that it is a simple impossibility for her to perform them all. In the event of each ward being placed under the management of two nurses, not only would the labours of the elder nurse be lessened but the comfort of the patients would be materially increased by closer attention being paid to their various requirements. At present it must continually happen that many poor sufferers are dependent upon their fellow patients for assistance in changes of position, in management of pillows, or in administration of food ... in many cases again unremitting attention by night as well as by day is a thing greatly to be desired: if this plan be adopted there would be no difficulty at any time of obtaining, in addition to our present very limited number of night nurses, young and active attendants. Moreover, the constant presence of a nurse in a ward would act as a check on the unruly propensities of some patients and prevent any infraction of the rules and regulations of the institution."

What a picture of life in a voluntary hospital in the late nineteenth century this conjures up, yet in answer to the criticism levelled at the doctors that they should have brought the matter to the attention of the Weekly Board before this they could only reply - "of what conceivable use would it have been to have reported such deficiencies, whose removal must be attended with a very considerable increase in the annual expenditure of the charity at a time when finances are in such a depressed and decadent condition. But by the scheme offered by Mr. Parry the problem is satisfactorily solved".

They go on to say - "With reference to the boon conferred on the community by the presence among it of trained and experienced nurses, very little need be said. It is difficult, nay impossible at the present time to obtain in this district a nurse upon whom both physician and patient may rely with implicit confidence".

The motion to be put to the meeting on the 16th February was "that the Resolution of the Weekly Board passed on the 29th December last for the admission of pupil nurses into the wards of the Infirmary be rescinded". The anticipated size of the meeting was such that the Mayor granted the use

of the Tolsey because the committee room at the Infirmary was not big enough. 124 Governors and subscribers attended and so controversial was the issue they had great difficulty in finding an impartial chairman. The discussion went on for four hours and was bitter and acrimonious yet of such public interest that it was reported in full in the Gloucester Journal. No one denied the need for additional nurses in the Infirmary. Three years before this, in December 1861, the Weekly Board had passed a resolution that "in consequence of the increased duties devolving upon the nurses it was desirable that two extra assistant nurses be appointed to relieve the nurses in their heavy duties". But it had not been acted upon because "no accommodation could be found for them".

Prior to the meeting on February 16th, enquiries had been made of several hospitals as to their practice in this matter of obtaining pupil nurses and the reply of Mrs. Sarah Wardroper, Matron of St. Thomas's was quoted in full. "The nurses of this institution are chiefly trained by ourselves. I neither select them from 'sisterhoods' nor 'homes' nor are we in any way connected with either. A training school for nurses is attached to St. Thomas's at the cost of the Nightingale Fund which, under the direction of the Nightingale Committee, I superintend. The number of young women trained annually varies from 10-15. I find considerable difficulty in obtaining suitable women for this work. The demand for our nurses is very heavy and increasing and far exceeds my power to supply". This reply was of little value to the Governors in their deliberations.

Lord Ellenborough's speech expressed the points of view of those who supported the admission of pupil nurses: "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of having trained nurses and not merely women who can be hired by the day to attend to a sick person without caring or knowing what is necessary in order to diminish the suffering he must necessarily undergo. But people who understand, as Miss Nightingale has attempted to teach the world, all those things it is necessary to know in order to attend the poor man in order to diminish his suffering and aid his recovery".

Mr. Gambier Parry added "I may remark that nursing is no simple subject. There is a great deal in it that must be gradually learnt. The only way to secure this would be by means of women who should go to the Infirmary to be trained and thus to acquire a thorough knowledge of their work". Dr. Ancrum firmly reminded the meeting that "the duties of a nurse were harassing and sometimes revolting and therefore they must take persons for nurses from the lower classes".

The fierce opposition to the proposed scheme was entirely on religious grounds as expressed by Mr. Glegram. He objected strongly to the Home chosen to supply the pupils, "the like of which were invading the Protestant feeling of the country." He expressed the fears of many

present when he said that the Church of England was being replaced by the Church of Rome and this feeling resulted in the final resolution being passed that "The resolution of the Weekly Board of the 29th December last, as to the admission of pupil nurses into the Infirmary be not acted upon during the present year nor until the same shall have received the further sanction of a General Meeting of the Governors". A leader in the Gloucester Journal sums up the effect of this result. "The resolution therefore has affected its object and whether by rescinding the original resolution of the Weekly Board or by postponing it indefinitely is comparatively immaterial, since we are all satisfied that we shall hear no more of it." The writer was quite right and no such solution to the problems of training nurses and providing extra nurses for the Infirmary was ever proposed by the Weekly Board again.

However, the problems remained and on March 2nd, 1865, there was the following communication from the Medical Staff: "We the undersigned physicians and surgeons of the Gloucester Infirmary beg to bring to the notice of the Weekly Board the insufficiency of the nursing department and to request them to enquire into the causes of the insufficiency and to adopt means for its removal". A special meeting was convened at 12.30 on March 9th, 1865 and the Weekly Visitor to the wards was asked to observe the situation and report to that meeting. He said that he had found all the wards in a satisfactory state and upon questioning the nurses and patients was told that they were "contented with their position".

The Medical Officers continued to insist that they considered the nursing department insufficient and that the causes were "the low wages of the nurses and their being employed in scrubbing the wards and other menial offices not desirable to be performed by nurses".

On March 16th a rather harassed Weekly Board passed a resolution to receive a committee appointed by the Earl Ducie on March 4th to consider the question of the nursing system at the Infirmary.

Also on the 16th, a difference of opinion arose "as to the construction of Rule 12 with regard to the power of the Weekly Board in order to enable this Institution to avail itself of any proffered remedy for the present insufficiency of its Nursing Department".

Three changes were finally proposed which were confirmed by a special General Meeting on May 15th.

1. In the limiting the number of nurses to one in each ward.
2. In the restriction on the discretion of the Weekly Board to obtain assistance for the nurses only "in cases of pressing emergency".

3. In the rule that "each nurse shall clean her ward before seven o'clock in the morning in summer and before eight o'clock in winter" to "Each nurse shall be responsible for the condition of her ward".

The pressure of work on the nurses had obviously resulted in them asking the patients to do more and the Medical Officers wanted some supervision of this because Rule 27 was also changed from "The patients who are capable shall assist the nurses in attending to other patients and shall wash linen and do such other work suited to them as the Matron may direct" to "The Matron shall have the authority to employ the patients in such work as shall be sanctioned by each patient's Medical Officer". Four under house maids were appointed to do the extra work.

On March 30th, 1865, a special sub-committee to report on "the general subject of nurses with a view to promoting greater efficiency in that department" was appointed. This was the result of a conference held at the request of the committee that had been formed by the Earl of Ducie with the Weekly Board when the following proposals had been discussed.

That the Weekly Board would consider the formation of a Nurses' Training Department in connection with and under the control and management of the executive of the Infirmary. The object being to supply well trained nurses to the Hospital and to the public.

That new rules should be framed, examples of which were:

1. The 'Nurses' Training Department' to be under the control of the Weekly Board, The Medical Officers, the Chaplain and the Matron of the Infirmary.
2. Nurses to consist of two classes. Those undergoing a ^{termed} 'Assistant Nurses' and those qualified to undertake the duties of nurses to be called 'Nurses'.
3. Assistant nurses only to be admitted between the ages of 25 and 40 years except under special circumstances. Expenses of their board, lodging and medical attendance are to be defrayed by the funds specially devoted to the 'Nurses Training Department'. They must be able to read and write and certificates of age and character will be required.
4. One month trial when the unfit or unwilling should leave the Institution with a gratuity. If suitable, to continue on a monthly payment until they are qualified and recognised as nurses.
5. The duties of nurses are to attend the sick in the Infirmary and the sick and poor elsewhere as the Weekly Board (or in cases of emergency) the Weekly Visitors, shall appoint, and when not engaged elsewhere then at the Infirmary to perform such domestic duties as shall be assigned to them.

6. Each nurse shall receive in addition to board, lodging, washing and medical attention, for the first years wages £12 rising by £2 a year to £20 in the fifth following, plus an extra 5/- (25p) a month if employed outside the Infirmary.
7. Nurses may be engaged for attendance on patients in the City and County on payment of a charge for the nurse's services of a sum sufficient to defray the expenses of their going and returning and supplied with suitable food, lodging and washing.
8. Payment for services according to fixed scales so the rich defray the cost of nurses needed by the 'indigent sick'.
9. Money received should belong to the 'Nurse Training Department'.
10. Eventually to be self-supporting but for 'some years after its establishment subscriptions should be earnestly requested to assist in supplying what is generally felt to be a most urgently required want'.

The sub-committee reported in November but in the meantime several matters came up in the minutes that may well have not arisen if the supply of nurses had been more adequate.

On May 4th against the specific rules of the Infirmary, "Thomas Awford, a child under the age of five years, recommended by Lord Coventry, was admitted in charge of his mother conditionally for a week, it being hoped that at the expiration of that time she would be able to separate herself from her child". On June 15th the coroner suggested that the Night Nurse should hold the key of the gate, as a man called James Reynolds fell into the Docks and was brought out alive but died at the gates of the Infirmary which were not opened for several minutes after he was brought there. The Board were reluctant to allow a nurse to hold the key but were willing to "make it more accessible to her", and on June 29th "it having been made apparent to this Board that due SUBORDINATION is NOT maintained in the Infirmary amongst the patients, it was proposed that any patient who disobeys the orders of the Matron or of the House Surgeons will be dismissed by the order of the Weekly Board. That this resolution be communicated to all the patients and they be informed that it will be strictly enforced. Also that it be communicated to the several Medical Officers and they be respectfully requested to assist in enforcing on their patients the necessity of strict compliance with it".

However, the nurses could not have helped to prevent the problem discussed by the Board on November 9th 1865: "In consequence of the candidates for admission to the Infirmary recommended from the different (Poor Law) Unions presenting themselves constantly without a proper supply of clothing,

viz: 3 shirts for men or shifts for females and 3 pairs of stockings, it was proposed and resolved that such candidates should not in future be admitted until they possess the necessary clothing and that a letter be addressed to the Chairman of each Union conveying the information of this resolution of the Weekly Board".

Financially the Infirmary was barely holding its own with an annual income of £3079 8s. 7d. and an expenditure of £3073 15s. 2d. in 1864 and it can be clearly seen that an increase of just one pupil nurse at £12 per annum would present problems. The report of the Sub-Committee appointed to enquire into the system of nursing at the Infirmary at Gloucester was therefore anxiously awaited and when it came was so comprehensive that it warrants a study in itself.

References

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