

ENFORCEMENT OF STATE REGISTRATION FOR NURSES IN VIRGINIA

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For something over three years, the State Examining Board for Nurses in Virginia has been trying to demonstrate to its satisfaction and the weal of nurses, and the public, the practical value of the "act to regulate the professional nursing of the sick" in this State. Profitting by the experience of our brethren, the medical and legal professions, the bill was made as broad and liberal as possible, with the understanding that after reasonable actual test it could be revised or amended. Nevertheless, all suggestion of subsequent amendment, with the exception of such requests from members of the Nurses' State Association, has been resented and combatted as an interference with technicalities distinctly our own. From the very start, the movement for State Registration of Nurses had very strong support and encouragement from all of the most prominent medical men in our State. The fact that they were fighting over some old battles of their own, at this time, perhaps made them doubly sympathetic and helpful. This also carried some weight with the law-makers, since they had previously found our medical champions very capable lobbyists. Our legal adviser was an experienced lobbyist, a very prominent lawyer and the husband of a very popular nurse. For these reasons, his fitness and value in this position are readily obvious. He was retained as counsel for the state board until his removal to the North to accept a partnership in a well-known law firm of Philadelphia. The most enthusiastic supporters of the bill in the Assembly were eminent lawyers, several closely allied with physicians of note, and in nearly every instance, men who, of their own personal experience, knew the unlimited possibilities in home or hospital practice of the nurse.

These factors, or conditions, have facilitated to a greater or less degree the work of the state board. They tended to increase its civic as well as its professional, status and importance; gave it, so to speak, a sort of prestige in the commonwealth. Many people for the first time, came to regard nursing as no longer a *trade*, but a *profession*. However liberal the terms of the Act, all who are acquainted with it—and few are not more or less so—realized that it set up an educational standard for nurses which, sooner or later, would become compulsory in Virginia.

The Maryland law is more recent, and has in some ways improved upon ours, especially in its terms of allowing non-graduates, or such as

graduated from schools giving less than the required time of training, to supplement this with additional training, since the enactment of this law. The law in Virginia allowed but one year from the time of its enactment in which nurses might apply to register without examination. This is an extremely short time; but in view of Virginia's geographical and professional position, she was obliged to protect herself from such tremendous cargoes of professional "driftwood," most of which formerly heading our way, from all accounts, now take refuge in the unprotected District of Columbia, all of whose border states now require registration. Another objection, or incompleteness in the Virginia law is the absence of any consideration of the insane hospitals. This was due to the fact that such nurses were, at that time, known as "attendants." The State Hospital Commission is now arranging better general training for its nurses which will enable them to apply for state certificates with examination.

Owing to the prevalence of small, not "special," hospitals in Virginia, it was deemed best to require *at least* two years of training in a hospital giving a systematic course of instruction. This has led to some disagreeable experiences with applicants, who claim to have left recognized schools for cause but have *graduated* from correspondence schools in order to claim diplomas.

The board is given considerable liberty and authority, being permitted to draw up its own rules and regulations, provided they are not inconsistent with the provisions of the Act. Members of the board are appointed by the Governor of Virginia, but the nominations for such office are made by the state association from its own members. We feel that we are much to be congratulated upon securing a board composed entirely of nurses; to this there has never been the slightest opposition. Such coöperation has the registration movement received, that our present legal counsel is no less a person than the Attorney-General of the state, but this may be due as much to the proverbial chivalry of gentlemen of Virginia as to the esteem for state registration. The conditional affiliation of schools has been tried in some localities to enable pupils to acquire requisite experience and instruction. An effort is being made to secure better facilities for instruction in domestic science, especially dietetics, for pupil-nurses. Owing to the size of the state and the long distances between the various centres of nursing schools, there has been considerable difficulty in arranging details of such a plan with any of our colleges for women, in which a course of domestic science is established.

The nurses in Virginia register, as a rule, without any difficulty; but in so doing, they expect *immediate* protection from all professional

ills and grievances, such as dismissed pupils on private duty at equal rates as R.N.'s, and many like woes. It has very recently been conceded that desire for financial gain cannot be the *raison d'être* for the board in Virginia. As the days go by, more and more cordial and universal support comes to us from the nursing profession and upon this depends the extent of state board usefulness. Going back a little more than one decade, the age of systematic education of nurses in Virginia, there is much to encourage us, our nurses having filled most creditably, positions of trust in older and larger hospitals in other states.

Boards of health and others of the medical profession rely upon us for the successful establishment of many enterprises for public safety. We are welcomed as members of the learned professions; and the people begin to see us no longer as a band of mere wage-earning women, but as their intelligent friends, ever battling courageously for their well-being and health in the most skilful manner known to modern science.

At its last meeting, the state board decided to furnish all registered nurses in Virginia with a small washable badge to be worn when on duty; a simple band bearing the letters R.N. and Virginia. The board will also request all telephone and city directories to use the title R.N. instead of trained or graduate nurse as heretofore. In this way it expects to help to educate the public in differentiating between nurses of whom they demand first class service and skill, and others, of whom they may expect but little. This must soon render the expressions trained and graduate nurse entirely obsolete.

The hospitals are bending their energies to meet the requirements of the board and, while improvements come slowly almost everywhere, and limited finances lessen their pace very materially in the south, yet the *spirit* is here which, after all, is the true capital. School inspection, which we find essential to fair and faithful work by the board, has just been begun. When completed, we shall know better what to demand of the schools and how to advise improvements. Without this information much injustice is being done all concerned.

“HUMAN life is made up of two elements, power and form, and the proportion must be invariably kept if we would have it sweet and sound. Each of these elements in excess makes a mischief as hurtful as its defects.”—*Emerson*.

THE RELIEF HOSPITAL of Brookton, Massachusetts, which has been occupying a house, is soon to have a new three story hospital.