

Hospital Libraries.¹

A PROPOSAL to collect some books for the use of the patients and nurses in our Cardiff Infirmary led to my making inquiries as to how far it is customary to have libraries in hospitals—if they are considered a desirable adjunct: in that case, how they are provided and maintained, how appreciated by those for whom they are intended, and if they are approved of and encouraged by the doctors.

One result of asking for help and advice has been the suggestion that it might be of interest to collect information upon this subject with the view of presenting it to this Conference, and through the kindness of Mr. Ballinger a number of forms have been sent out to hospitals and infirmaries asking questions upon these various points, and stating the purpose for which the answers were intended.

The result shows how general it is to have libraries in hospitals, and how generous people are and have been in providing and assisting them, and I feel that we shall be doing wisely in forming one for our Cardiff Infirmary, though we cannot hope to do as much as those institutions have done which are of greater size and of longer standing, and which have more means, help and support. Still, a great encouragement has been given us by the very kind gift of her own two works from Her Majesty the Queen, and of money and books from friends at home.

Out of seventy forms sent out thirty-four have been returned filled in, and as they represent many of our London hospitals and the hospitals and infirmaries of some of our most important towns, we have a fairly general opinion to judge from. We have received particulars of libraries for patients and for nurses; we are also told of libraries for the medical staff, and in the Leeds

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Infirmary and the Edinburgh Royal Infirmiry of libraries for servants.

Our informants are either the Secretary, Chaplain, Matron, or Chairman of Committee of the respective institutions.

As regards libraries for patients, in twenty-nine out of thirty-four cases, opinion is unanimous in considering a library a beneficial, a desirable, and often a necessary adjunct to a hospital.

There are always a few books for the use of the patients, but we hear of twenty-five organised libraries varying in size from 100 to 4,000 volumes; there being seven of over 1,000 volumes.

The answer to our question as to whether any endowment is known of for the purpose of providing and maintaining libraries in hospitals and infirmaries, is always "No," and in one instance a wish is expressed that there was one. It is only in the case of a library for the medical staff that there is any endowment existing. Invariably we find that the library is provided and maintained by gifts of books, by subscriptions and donations from friends—those connected with the institution and others—occasionally by trifles from patients, and in seven cases by the aid of grants from the house committee or from the institution itself.

The opinion of the medical staff on the possession of a library is one to which we naturally attach great importance, and only in three institutions do we find that the use of books is discouraged by the doctors; in fifteen they distinctly approve, or encourage, or support, and in other cases our question is unanswered, or so answered as to show that it is a point which has never come under consideration at all; so that I think we may infer that if rightly and judiciously made use of a library is certainly considered beneficial. Indeed, in a paragraph concerning ward libraries at St. George's Hospital, London, we read that they "are found highly conducive to the physical as well as to the mental improvement of the patients."

I have been privately informed by nurses of experience of the beneficial effect of reading upon patients—how it prevents them from brooding over their illness, how it amuses and informs them, how glad many are of the opportunity of a "read," the taste for good literature being constantly found; and I can imagine that among the convalescents the passing of monotonous hours is made by it less irksome, and that it provides topics for talk and discussion.

Talking of convalescents reminds me that we have left convalescent homes out of our list of institutions ; but I think there can be no doubt that there, if anywhere, books are needed and are sure to be found.

The answer as to whether books are appreciated by patients is invariably the same—"Yes"; in many cases a much-emphasised affirmative. Naturally we do not always expect a great number of readers, both from the fact of the various classes of patients which fill the wards, and from the nature of their ailments, reading being to some a pleasure and a desirable distraction, and to others an unknown taste, or unattractive, and also a physical impossibility. I imagine that the practice usually carried out of having bookcases in each ward adds to the attractiveness of books through the patients being able to study their titles ; and I am told that ward libraries are more useful than when the books are kept elsewhere. As the patients are continually changing it does not matter if the books remain unchanged ; and if, as I expect, the ward Sister, as knowing the characters and occupations of the patients, gives out the books, it is easier for her when they are at hand. There is sure to be elsewhere a reserve of books from which these bookcases are replenished. Where there are no ward libraries the books are kept in some special place and distributed as required.

We have asked no question upon the kind of literature usually supplied, but a few remarks have been sent us on that subject. Short stories, books of travel, biographies, anything interesting but not sensational, are suggested, and we can believe that the character of the books should be well considered, so as to make the reading attractive and suitable to the physical condition of such readers as patients.

Stress is also strongly laid upon the books being light to hold, of good print, and not too long.

We are told that there is one great objection to literature being supplied to hospitals in the form of books, and that is the necessity for their being often condemned to be burnt. It is not always considered wise to take them from ward to ward, to have them too long in use, or to have them too well bound ; but the existence of all these libraries proves that it is an objection which can be overcome, and the people who raise the point suggest the remedy of having the books cheaply bound, so that they may be destroyed without much compunction. I hear that there has been a good deal of discussion lately as to whether in

lending books infection has not been spread, but the result of this investigation is that no proof has been found that such is the case. A library in the hospital, however, would make it unnecessary for books to be lent to patients, and would prevent the chance of any such thing taking place. In some answers we are reminded how greatly magazines and periodicals are appreciated by the patients, and how especially acceptable they are when the current numbers are given instead of odd back numbers which have lost much of their interest, and a wish is expressed for subscriptions towards the taking in of special magazines. Possibly, arrangements could be made with clubs and reading rooms to obtain, at a low rate, copies of periodicals a month after date. I hardly consider that this comes under the subject of libraries, but as it is suggested to us I feel I must mention it.

I expect, in many cases, free libraries present copies of magazines, or would do so. From the Cardiff Free Library weekly parcels are sent to the Workhouse Hospital, the Sanatorium; also to the lightships and lighthouses in the port of Cardiff.

This seems to be the only form in which literature can be sent to a sanatorium, where the cases taken in are of an infectious nature.

We find that in fifteen cases there are libraries for the medical staff, but we have asked no further questions upon this point.

As to libraries for nurses, much information is given.

In those cases where they do not use the patients' library we find twenty well organised ones for their own use.

There are many ways in which they have been provided. The one at Charing Cross was given by Mr. Passmore Edwards. At the Middlesex Hospital it was originated at the instance of Lord Sandhurst, the late Chairman. At St. Bartholomew's it was provided by the nurses themselves. At University College Hospital a sum of money was invested for the purpose, in memory of a nurse, by a benefactor of the hospital; and at St. George's the library was materially increased by a grant made in Jubilee Year, while gifts from nurses, doctors, friends, sales of work, donations, and subscriptions from nurses show the means of providing a library, which is evidently considered necessary and valuable.

We have asked of what kind of books such a library consists, and in many cases medical and surgical books and those on

nursing are mentioned, and we can understand their value to their readers, as they are very expensive to buy and yet necessary for examination purposes. But fiction, standard works, and everything good are apparently greatly appreciated, as we can judge from the catalogue sent us from the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, and from the description of "excellent" as applied to several of the other collections.

In giving books for this purpose, we are told to remember that a nurse off duty is sometimes too tired to settle down to any very serious reading, and needs diverting and interesting literature. Those few are to be congratulated who have the new books of the year added to their catalogue.

Where there is no library, tickets are given to a free library, or special magazines on nursing, &c., are taken in.

I ought to have said that in all cases where there are libraries for patients and for nurses, provision is made for their being under special charge and properly looked after.

In conclusion, this paper will have served its purpose if it succeeds in any way in enlisting the interest of the members of this conference in rather an out of the way corner of library work. I have no doubt that in other institutions similar to our Cardiff Infirmary a need is felt for books, and that help would be gratefully accepted, for if there is a library it has to be renewed. It is not that in any case a large library is wanted, it is that the books supplied should be suitable, and I cannot help feeling that if this powerful organisation would consider this matter, any institution commending itself to their notice as desirous of books, would, through its means, be provided with such a collection as would be found to be of benefit to its readers, and especially "highly conducive to the physical as well as to the mental improvement of its patients."

DOROTHY TYLOR.

Answers received from—

Cancer Hospital ...	...	...	London.
University College Hospital	...	...	"
Guy's Hospital ...	...	...	"
Royal Free Hospital	...	...	"
Charing Cross Hospital...	...	...	"
St. Thomas' Hospital	...	...	"
Middlesex Hospital	...	...	"

Answers received from—

St. Bartholomew's Hospital ...	London
Great Ormond Street Hospital...	„
London Hospital	„
St. George's Hospital	„
St. Mary's Hospital	„
German Hospital	„
West London Hospital	Hammersmith.
Infirmary	Newport, Mon.
National Hospital	Ventnor.
L. H. H....	London.
Infirmary	Bradford, Yorks.
General Infirmary	Leeds.
Infirmary	Stockport.
General Hospital... ..	Birmingham.
General Infirmary	Worcester.
Royal Infirmary	Edinburgh.
Poplar Hospital for Accidents.	
Salford Royal Hospital.	
Royal Infirmary	Glasgow.
Royal Infirmary	Bristol.
Royal Hospital	Portsmouth.
Eye and Ear Infirmary	Liverpool.
Infirmary	Leicester.
Borough Infirmary	Birkenhead
77, Lord Street Infirmary	Liverpool.
Radcliffe Infirmary	Oxford.
Derbyshire Royal Infirmary	Derby.