

The Function and Training of Mental Nurses. By A. N. Oppenheim, B.A. with the assistance of Beryl Eemann, M.A.(Cantab.). Chapman & Hall. 12/6

In 1951 the Board of Governors of the Maudsley-Bethlem group of hospitals arranged for a job analysis of their nurses' work to be carried out by psychologists employed on the Staff of the Institute of Psychiatry. The results of this investigation have now been published and provides interesting, as well as occasionally surprising, information on the functions of the nursing staff in the two hospitals. It would not of course be fair to compare the findings with those likely to obtain in the average mental hospital, since the type of institution is so very different, especially in that there are no chronic or senile wards in either the Bethlem or Maudsley Hospitals, but there are many features of resemblance and this report will be of considerable value to those concerned with the staffing of mental hospitals throughout the country.

The main purpose of the investigation was to find out how much time is spent by mental nurses in actual nursing duties and how much on domestic tasks. The methods and conditions of training were also studied and particular attention was paid to the influence of existing methods on recruitment and wastage. Examination was made of the work of the various grades of staff, ranging through Sisters, senior nurses, middle rank nurses, junior and part-time nurses, their duties being broken down into various categories with numerous sub-divisions, e.g. care of patients, household duties, reception and management, etc.

Great differences were found in the time spent by different grades of staff in the two hospitals on similar tasks. All the nurses at the Bethlem Hospital spent more of their time talking to patients than did those at the Maudsley. With Sisters and Charge Male Nurses this amounted to 19% at Bethlem as compared with 7% at the Maudsley. 21% of the Maudsley Sisters' time was spent with doctors, matrons, psychologists and visitors, they also spent more time in their offices. Senior nurses at the Maudsley are largely concerned with administrative duties, but at Bethlem 48% of their time is devoted directly to patients.

The young student nurses spend from 32 to 45% of their time (depending on the hospital in which they work) on domestic duties. It is implied that this concentration of the junior nurses' time on the household duties may be one important reason for nurses leaving before completing their first year of training.

It is perhaps surprising to read that preparing and serving meals and part of the washing up afterwards occupy the entire ward team, including the Sister or Charge Male Nurse. The nurses

also act as waitresses. Apparently patients themselves do very little domestic work in the wards.

The author indicates that a reorientation is needed in the training of nurses in their dealings with patients. Too much emphasis is apt to be laid on physical treatments so that nurses fail to realise the importance of their role in psychotherapy—"Almost any other duty seems to take precedence over 'talking to patients'".

The differences in the shift system of working are fully discussed and much useful argument is brought forward on both sides. At Bethlem a two-shift system is worked, which means that on an average a full-time nurse is on duty throughout the day from 7.30 a.m. to 8 p.m. with the equivalent of $2\frac{1}{2}$ days a week off duty, while at the Maudsley where the three-shift system obtains, the day nurses are divided into two shifts, one shift working until 2 p.m. when the other takes over. It is estimated that to put Bethlem on a three-shift system would require some 15 nurses above the number at present available.

There is no doubt that from the patients' point of view the two-shift system has definite advantages, but the question of fatigue at the end of a long day is one which has not yet been answered.

The third part of the report is devoted to Recruitment and Training. Application forms are sent to all who apply for admission to the hospitals for training as nurses, but only about 30% of these forms are ever returned, and of these approximately 40% are rejected for various reasons. Training includes ward talks by registrars but the value of these varies greatly according to the skill and enthusiasm of individual doctors, while nurses at Bethlem attended on the average only 32% of the talks available to them.

This is a comprehensive and valuable report which throws much new light on the causes of dissatisfaction among mental nurses and suggests various ways in which both recruitment and methods of training might be improved.

The only complaint one might make is that the price seems unduly high for so slender a paper-backed volume.

J. SAWLE THOMAS,

Lunacy, Law, and Conscience, 1744-1845. By Kathleen Jones, Ph.D.
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. 21/-

This book, which is the latest addition to the "International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction", maintains the high standards set by the previous publications in that series. As one would expect, the author approaches her topic from the viewpoint of the Social Historian. She deals with the development of lunacy