CIRCULAR ON THE CARE AND DISPOSITION OF PERSONS FOUND UNCONSCIOUS ON THE STREETS OR ELSEWHERE.

PREPARED BY A SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE COUNTY OF KINGS, N. Y.

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BROOKLYN, June 10, 1895.

DEAR SIR :

By direction of the Medical Society of the County of Kings the accompanying report is sent to you. Will you be kind enough to reprint so much of it as your space will permit, and also call attention, editorially, to the important matter of which it treats?

Respectfully,

J. H. RAYMOND, M. D.,
J. C. SHAW, M. D., } *Committee.*
L. D. MASON, M. D.,

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CARE OF PERSONS FOUND UNCONSCIOUS ON THE STREETS.

ROOMS OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE COUNTY OF KINGS,
BROOKLYN, N. Y., *June* 1, 1895.

At a meeting of the Medical Society of the County of Kings, held February 20, 1894, a Committee of Three was appointed, "to report to the Society what means have been provided in the city of Brooklyn for the immediate care of persons found unconscious on the streets." The Committee made a preliminary and a final report, the latter at the December meeting of the Society, at which meeting it was authorized to issue a circular, in which should be embodied its recommendations, and to send the same to the medical journals, to the managers of the different hospitals of the city, and to such other organizations as it might deem wise.

In accordance with these instructions, the Committee has prepared the following circular, which it recommends to the consideration of the members of all medical societies, as being largely instrumental in shaping public opinion; to Health Boards, as being the power appointing in many instances ambulance surgeons; to managers of hospitals, as having in some measure the same appointing power, and especially as being the authorities receiving and caring for accident cases; and to the police authorities, who are principally instrumental in summoning aid for those who are injured or taken ill in the streets.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. Whenever a person is found in an unconscious or semi-conscious state on the street, or elsewhere, away from his own home, the police, when notified of such case, shall immediately summon medical aid; sending for the ambulance surgeon, or for the police surgeon; or in towns, where there are no such officials, then for the nearest physician, who should be compensated for his services by the authorities.

2. The police shall not decide as to the disposition of such a case, but must await the decision of the ambulance surgeon, police surgeon, or of the physician called, and must act in accordance with such decision.

3. A police officer who acts in opposition to such decision should be by the ambulance surgeon, police surgeon, or the physician, reported to the Police Commissioner, who should sub-

ject such officer to discipline, rules governing such cases having previously been made and promulgated.

4. Ambulance surgeons should give prompt and immediate aid to patients found in the condition hitherto described, and remove them to the nearest hospital, or to their homes when ascertainable, according as their judgment dictates is the best course to pursue in the interest of the patients. The existence of an alcoholic complication in the case should in nowise adversely influence the surgeon or physician called as to the disposition of the case, as such a complication often renders skillful medical treatment the more imperative.

5. Ambulance surgeons, and other medical men, brought in contact with cases in which alcoholism is a frequent complication, should be reminded that this condition often renders an immediate diagnosis impossible in the most serious and oftentimes fatal forms of cerebral disease and injury, as well as in other diseased conditions.

6. The examination of ambulance surgeons should include the differential diagnosis of alcoholic coma from other forms of coma, and the various diseases or injuries that may produce a condition simulating alcoholic intoxication.

7. Hospital authorities receiving financial aid from the city should not refuse admittance to patients suffering from supposed alcoholism, for in so doing they are liable to be contributory to the death of such patients. They should know, that if the condition be one of uncomplicated alcoholism, this fact will in a short time be revealed, and other disposition may be subsequently made of the case ; while, if the patient is so affected as to need immediate and skillful treatment, his rejection by the hospital authorities may conduce to a fatal result. If they refuse to receive such cases, because complicated with alcoholism, they should be held legally responsible for the results. And, further, if such refusal is persistent after their attention has been called to the matter, the city authorities should strike the name of such hospital from its list of beneficiaries.

8. The municipal authorities should also consider the question of the establishment of a special emergency hospital, or hospitals, conveniently located with reference to the various districts of the city ; or a system, similar to that of the Bureau d'Admission in Paris, connected with which there is a special hospital for all cases of alcoholism, or cases complicated with alcoholism, that may occur in the streets of that city. Or, the authorities might consider

the establishment of a special department in connection with the hospitals of the city, similar to the "Alcoholic Wards" of Bellevue Hospital, New York, where more than 4,000 alcoholics are annually treated. Such a plan would relieve the general hospitals of the burden of such cases, or compel them to make special provision for their care. Should the existing methods prove inadequate, the Committee recommends some such plan as is here outlined.

It is the hope of the Committee, now that the attention of all concerned has been specifically called to the matter, that they will co-operate in such a manner, by adopting rules and otherwise, so that methods will prevail in Brooklyn and other cities in the management of cases of the nature described, such as exist in most European cities. If this is done, then persons who are rendered unconscious from any cause on the streets or elsewhere, will receive prompt medical and humane treatment, and will escape the danger of being thrust in a cell as "drunks," and there left to sleep off the supposed debauch, which in no inconsiderable number of cases has proved to be "a sleep that knows no waking."

The recommendations of this circular are in keeping with the spirit of the resolutions already adopted by the Medical Society of the County of Kings, and with the practice pursued in the principal cities of Europe. No attempt has been made to treat the subject exhaustively, or to give in detail rules and regulations, which can only be done by the respective authorities of a municipality. It is hoped, that wherever a similar defect exists, similar remedies will be applied. We invite the aid of medical societies and the medical and secular press in procuring the desired reformation.

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