

HISTORY OF THE VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION

EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN

In 1903 a group of thirty women decided that a Visiting Nurse Association should be organized in Eau Claire.

There was no other Visiting Nurse Association in Wisconsin at the time and in fact no other public health nursing agency in our State to give advice and so the Visiting Nurse Association of Chicago was consulted. This resulted in forming a Visiting Nurse Association of high standards. Graduate nurses were employed throughout the many years of continuous service which the Visiting Nurse Association rendered to the people of Eau Claire.

Funds were raised by means of annual dues of \$6 per year.

First officers and Directors of the Visiting Nurse Association were the following:

Mrs. H.J. McGrath-----President
Mrs. A.A. Cutter-----First Vice-President
Mrs. J.T. Joyce-----Second Vice-President
Mrs. T.B. Keith-----Third Vice-President
Miss Minnie G. Smith----Secretary
Mrs. D.S. Clark-----Treasurer

Office space was provided by the Associated Charities which was organized a few years earlier. Mrs. Ivah B. Wilttrout who was then secretary of the Associated Charities did much to help the new Visiting Nurse Association get started.

The need for a well-equipped Loan Closet was recognized from the start and throughout the years the Loan Closet Committee of the Visiting Nurse Association aroused the interest of many volunteer groups to help keep the Loan Closet well stocked with supplies.

During the first year one of the nurses employed spent three months with the Visiting Nurses in Chicago which gave the Eau Claire infant organization much confidence in developing a good program.

We read the following explanatory note in the first Annual Report:

"For the information of those who are interested in this charity but who are not as yet members a brief explanation of the work of the Visiting Nurse may not be amiss.

They are called Visiting Nurses because they visit from house to house each day and return the next day to repeat the service. The bitterest day in winter, the hottest day in summer, the pouring rain are all alike to the Visiting Nurse; she must make her rounds, fifteen minutes here, thirty there, an hour here, another there, carrying with her in as small compass as possible all the necessary appliances for her work; she goes from one patient to another, from the Third to the Ninth Ward, from the Red Row to Shawtown; here making beds, preparing nourishment, giving sponge baths, there bandaging a leg or applying a dressing, but in all cases carrying out the doctors orders, leaving notes of temperature and general condition and instructing the family in the care of the patient during her absence. In short doing all in her power for the comfort of the sufferer."

The report states that 904 visits were made to 118 patients that first year.

In 1904 the Visiting Nurse must have recognized a real problem in the many tuberculosis patients in Eau Claire.

A survey was made and the alarming results brought to the attention of city officials.

Tents were provided for the use of tubercular patients. Board Members helped to arouse interest in the early erection of a County Sanatorium.

In 1905 the Visiting Nurse Association obtained the approval of the Eau Claire County Medical Society and we read the Annual report of that year:

"At the meeting of the Eau Claire Medical Society held on June 26th, 1905, the following resolution regarding the "Visiting Nurse Association" was unanimously adopted;

Resolved that we most heartily endorse their efforts, recognizing therein the initial step to a work of incalculable benefit, not only to the individual sufferer, and his family, but to the community at large, a further step in the advancement of the welfare of the commonwealth.

I heartily endorse the Visiting Nurse Association. They are doing good work."

DR. MIDELFART

In 1907 & 8 we read in the Annual Report:

"It is gratifying to report another year of good work for the Eau Claire Visiting Nurse Association. The opportunities for doing good, perhaps, were greater than usual, owing to the vast amount of sickness and the destitution brought on by lack of employment of many people heretofore self-supporting.

Since our last annual meeting our nurse has made 1947 visits, thus caring for 210 people who were sick. At one time during the year the nurse took care of fourteen cases of consumption, fifteen cases of diphtheria and five cases of scarlet fever. At another time she had ten cases of typhoid fever. An average of eighteen chronic cases have been visited at least once a week."

In 1909 & 10 over 1800 visits were made to 398 patients. The narrative report of the Visiting Nurse work explains the following:

"She has taken care of tubercular patients showing them how to live and how to employ the proper sanitary methods to avoid spreading the dread disease.

The smallest part of her work, however, is her actual personal care of the sick. Her greater efforts are spent in showing them how to live in a healthier, more sensible way.

She teaches the patient, or the mother of the house, the simple and easy way to follow the doctor's instructions; how to bathe; apply compresses and preparations; what food to purchase and how it should be prepared and preserved. Her duties are those of a skilled nurse, acting under a doctor's orders."

From 1910-1916 the work and interest increased rapidly. The annual budget increased from \$792 the first year to \$1083.49 in 1912.

On the membership list of 280 members, we find many familiar local names.

In 1916 Mother's group meetings were held and babies and pre-school children were weighed and measured. Health talks were given by the doctors.

Interesting reports of patients are found in the old files.

In 1917 the Visiting Nurse Association was given free office space in the old City Building and moved from 308½ S. Barstow Street to the new quarters over the Fire Department.

That same year the Visiting Nurse Association, or rather in 1919, appealed to the Board of Education to employ a school nurse and in the fall of that year the first school nurse came to Eau Claire. Office space was offered by the Visiting Nurse Association and the school nurse and visiting nurse occupied the same office together for six years.

In 1918 was the year of the "Flu" epidemic. The work increased tremendously. The annual report states that the Visiting Nurse made 2320 visits to 617 patients. In cooperation with the Red Cross a soup kitchen was established for "Flu" patients. A motor service was started to enable the nurse to make more visits.

In 1918 the Visiting Nurse Association took over the Metropolitan Nursing Service which was previously taken care of by the students of Luther Hospital under the direction of Mrs. Baird.

In 1918 the Chest Clinics were started in cooperation with the W.A.T.A. and paid for with local Christmas Seal money. These monthly clinics have been continued ever since. This Service turned over to the Health Department in 1941 and were discontinued in 1951. Nearly 300 patients were examined at the three-day clinic in 1918.

In 1918 the first contract was signed with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company to give nursing care to their Industrial policyholders which has been continued ever since. Also, discontinued in January 1953.

In 1919 & 20 during the Flu epidemic a motor service was provided by Board Members donating personal cars and chauffeurs to enable the Visiting Nurse to make more visits to the many ill patients.

In 1920 the Visiting Nurse Association Board members made an appeal to the County Board for a County Nurse and the first County nurse was employed that same year but discontinued again after three years.

In 1921 the Visiting Nurse Association bought the first car for the nurse. The "Flu" epidemic convinced members that much more work could be accomplished with a car than by means of street car service. A chain letter to Business men and various firms asking for donations produced the funds for the car.

In 1921 the Visiting Nurse was given a leave of absence to attend a public health nursing course given by W.A.T.A.

In 1922 the Hospital Fund was established for needy patients, especially children and undernourished infants. Both Luther and Sacred Heart Hospitals offered free care to a limited number of needy children and special rates were allowed for other patients sent in by the Visiting Nurse. An average of 50 needy patients were hospitalized through this fund each year.

In 1922 student nurses from both hospitals were given from two to four weeks of experience with the Visiting Nurse in the field. This service for student nurses was continued for 12 years. As a result a number of nurses became interested in taking post-graduate work in public health nursing.

In 1922 the Child Health Conference was organized and held at irregular intervals at the Elk's Club.

In 1923 the Medical Society approved these Child Health Conferences to be held one morning each month with the doctors giving free services.

The Annual Report of that year shows the interesting activities carried on by the Visiting Nurse aside from routine visits in the homes:

- 8 Child Health Conferences
- 1 Eye Clinic in cooperation with the State School for the Blind
- 2 Chest Clinics
- 1 Orthopedic Clinic sponsored by the Medical Society
- Health Exhibits arranged at 2 Fairs

In 1924 upon the death of Mrs. H.J. McGrath, who was leader and President of the Association for twenty years, the other officers and Directors took over responsibilities. Mrs. P.M. Beach was elected President and through her efforts the Visiting Nurse Association was incorporated in 1925.

In the Charter the object of the Association was defined thus:

The Purpose of this Association shall be to give skilled nursing care and instruction to the sick in their homes; to promote health, individual and community; to prevent disease. This service to be carried on in the City of Eau Claire.

A rotating Board of seven members were placed in charge of the Organization.

In 1927 the members of the Board of Directors decided that due to increased demands upon our nursing service and the growth of the City, something must be done about a second nurse.

Mrs. R.W. Owen, in order to provide some assistance for two years, donated the services of a nurse-aide from her own home to help the Visiting Nurse in the office as well as in the field.

In 1928 the Pre-School Clinics for pre-school children were started. Mrs. A.W. MacLeod, then President of the Association, did much to promote these clinics and to gain the cooperation of the P.T.A. groups for this new undertaking. These clinics were approved by the Central Council of Social Agencies. They were later turned over to the City-County Health Department.

An Exhibit Committee was appointed with Mrs. S.R. Davis as chairman to set up appropriate health exhibits for each Child Health Conference. At the end of the year the twelve exhibits were collected and shown at Mother's Club Meetings in both the 9th Ward and 10th Ward. A three-day Institute on Maternal and Child Health was also arranged for both Mother's Clubs with local doctors and a doctor from the State Bureau of Maternal and Child Health taking part in the program.

In 1930 at the height of the depression the Maternity Loan Fund was established to provide Hospital care for needy Maternity cases. The Service League has kept up a revolving Fund for this ever since. By agreement the doctors, hospitals, Relief Department, and Visiting Nurse Association all cooperated toward one aim--to give every expectant mother an opportunity to go to the hospital for delivery and as a result Eau Claire has an enviable record of hospitalizing 98% of all maternity cases.

It was in 1930 that the nurses started to make birth follow-up visits to all new-born babies in the City.

It was also at this time that the Visiting Nurse Association decided to pay the doctors for their services at the Child Health Conferences, and \$120 was set aside for that purpose in the Budget each year.

It was during this period also that the Visiting Nurse Association received several large individual donations and memorial gifts. Mrs. Dulaney gave \$1000, and \$100 came from the Masonic Lodge through the John Robert's Fund. Then there were the Alber and Fiske Memorials of \$100 each. The income from some of these gifts were placed in the reserve fund for the benefit of some of our patients.

In 1932 when Mrs. R.W. Owen was President, the Community Welfare Fund was organized in Eau Claire and the Visiting Nurse Association joined the fund and derived the largest share of its Budget from that source ever since.

Also in 1932 the Business and Professional Women's Club volunteered to finance a new project, called the Infant Welfare Foundation which has been kept up ever since that time. Attractive informational cards are sent to all mothers of new-born babies in Eau Claire when the baby is 1-3-5-8 months and a year old.

In 1933 the local Tuberculosis Association provided funds for a part-time nurse to assist in more intensive TB follow-up nursing. This later resulted in a third full-time visiting nurse although much of her time was spent in TB follow-up nursing up to 1941. Then turned over to the City-County Health Dept..

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In 1935 the Service League gave additional funds for correction of defects among children, especially tonsils and glasses, and the Corrective Fund was started. More than 500 children benefited through this Fund in the 12 years from 1935-1945.(?)

Church groups and the Visiting Nurse Sewing Auxiliary organized by Mrs. F.S. Cook kept the Loan Closet well supplied for the nurses. Mrs. A.J. Geske was loan closet chairman for many many years.

Also in 1935 the Service League established the Milk Fund to supply additional milk for undernourished children and convalescent patients. Each year some 30 or 40 patients benefit through this Fund.

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In 1934 when Mrs. A.O. Ayres was President the Visiting Nurse Association started to have joint annual meetings with the Family Service Association. Many people attended these joint meetings which formally opened the Community Chest drive each year.

In 1936 Mrs. Playter succeeded Mrs. Ayres as President of the Organization. The City Council voted to increase the appropriation for Visiting Nurse Service which made it possible to employ a third full-time nurse.

Also in 1936 many of the doctors and dentists pledged free services amounting to \$2621 to be used for our patients through the Community Chest drive. This was repeated for several years in succession.

In 1937 & 38 Mrs. J.J. Selmer was President of the Association. Much was done in the interest of the loan closet and the furtherance of the tuberculosis program.

In 1937 the urgent need for an Immunization Clinic became apparent and the Visiting Nurse Association appealed to the City to make possible such Clinic through the Health Department. Visiting Nurses rounded up the pre-school children and assisted the health officer at the Clinics. This service was, also, taken over by the City-County Health Department a few years later.

In 1939 Mrs. S.A. Henke succeeded Mrs. Selmer as President and during her term of office a Nurses Committee was organized which did much to interest the Board in the need for clerical help in the office. Mrs. R.W. Owen had given volunteer service regularly in the office three mornings a week since 1930 but more needed to be done. As a result N.Y.A. service was secured through the courtesy of that Department. Moving pictures were taken to illustrate every phase of the nursing service and were shown at various group meetings throughout the year.

In 1940 Mrs. R.A. Buckley took office as President. The Constitution and By-Laws of the Visiting Nurse Association were revised and the Board enlarged to a membership of thirty. The first full-time office clerk was employed with funds provided for it in the Budget.

In 1940 the V.N.A. accepted the responsibility for the mailing list and files for the Christmas Seal Sale with our clerk giving almost full-time to that work during November, December, and January each year and Board Members and Service League members give much volunteer service to complete the task.

In 1940 when the City-County Unit came into being, the Immunization Clinics, the Chest Clinics with follow-up service, the Pre-school Clinics, and much of the communicable disease nursing was turned over to the nursing personnel in the Health Department. This made it possible for our 3 visiting nurses to devote much more time to good bedside care to the sick in their homes, our first and always most important objective.

In 1941 to 1945 during the war, much time was given over to Red Cross Service. Home nursing classes were taught continuously in the V.N.A. office. The Visiting Nurse Director served as nurse recruitment chairman, Civilian Defense Nursing Chairman, and Disaster Relief Nurse Chairman. She also served 2 years as State President of the new State Organization for Public Health Nursing and 4 years as President of Eau Claire District of Wisconsin State Nurses Association, all of which required extra time and effort on the part of all three visiting nurses.

In 1942 the City Council for a third time increased the appropriation to the Visiting Nurse Association making it a complete \$1500 annually.

The nurse Director was appointed by the mayor as a member of the Civilian Defense Council to represent Nursing under the Medical Emergency Unit.