

Chapter 2

The Sydney Sanitarium between the Two World Wars (1920s and 1930s)

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Introduction

She had grown up in Victoria, the daughter of an itinerant builder and his wife. They had moved from town to town as work became available to support their family of five children. She left school when she finished grade eight and soon after, along with her parents, older sister, and younger brother, heard and accepted the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) message and was baptised. In her late teens she obtained domestic work at the Warburton Sanitarium and was inspired to train as a nurse. So in 1924 she left home, sailed by ship from Melbourne to Sydney, and commenced the nurse training course at the Sydney Sanitarium.¹

He grew up in a family of dairy farmers in northern NSW where he had been involved with the task of milking cows twice a day, even before he was 4 years of age. By the time he was eight he was up at 4.00 am each day to help his father, mother, older sister and younger brother milk 80 cows. He would then walk a few kilometres to school, walk home again after the school day finished, and get back to milking the 80 cows again—all by hand—as there were no milking machines in those days. So he grew up knowing what hard work was. The family eventually numbered nine, with seven children in total. They were Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) and he had a yearning to minister in some capacity. So in 1924 he attended Avondale College, then known as Australasian Missionary College, and the next year moved to Sydney to start training as a nurse, also at the Sydney Sanitarium.²

These two young people illustrate the dozens who, in the years between the two World Wars, undertook nurse training in the Medical Missionary Training School at the Sydney Sanitarium, as it was initially known. The institution's identity, along with its name, had been expanded to the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital by the late 1920s,³ although it continued to be fondly known by many in the community and the SDA Church as the 'San', a name which continues even today.

So what was the San like back in the 1920s and 1930s and why did so many young people move hundreds of miles from their families in order to become nurses when they could so easily have undertaken training closer to their homes? This paper will focus on this institution in the era between the two World Wars: how it trained its student nurses, the types of patients it cared for and the science, if any, which underpinned the care given.

Post World War 1

Let's begin with 1919, the year immediately after the end of World War I. There were two events in that year which had a major impact on the future of the institution. The first happened on January 10, 1919. In the early hours of the morning a fire started in the operating theatre which was located under the light tower of the San. This was a well-known feature of the district because at night "a large red light which could be seen for miles around shone out from the top"⁴. Fortunately, the approximately 100 patients and staff were removed to safety and nobody was significantly injured.⁵ Damage to the building was limited to the light tower, operating theatre and some rooms used as accommodation for nurses.⁶

The Board of Management took the opportunity to make improvements during the re-building process. In particular, the new tower was re-designed to be about 1.82 metres shorter than the previous one. The rationale for this change was that the new design was in better proportion with the rest of the building and, being narrower, did not sway in strong winds, which had been a problem with the original.⁷ The Board can be commended for applying appropriate theories from physics and engineering to the new design. Six months after the fire the repairs had been completed.

The lights in the new tower were now both red and white and penetrated into the darkness even more than previously, thus becoming a greater symbol of the institution's mission to spread light to the community. An easily accessible, octagonal-shaped room below the dome of the tower allowed views for several kilometres in all directions. On clear days patients, staff and visitors could see out to the Pacific Ocean on one side and up to the Blue Mountains on another. A lounge for patients was built under the tower, located where the operating theatre had been. This was possible because the decision had also been made by the Union Conference to expand the institution with a new brick building which would include a new operating theatre and accommodation for 30 additional patients.⁸

The initial building had been built with timber because it was cheaper than brick, and thought to be healthier since it was drier.⁹ However, the fire hazard posed by a wooden health facility, now clearly apparent, drove the decision to build the new extension in brick. It was completed in 1920 and opened on the 3rd of May. In 1926, after much debate and controversy, the installation of an X-ray machine was completed.¹⁰ This facility, other items of modern laboratory equipment, a heating system and an automatic lift, were some of the reasons why the San was recognised at the time as being one of the best-equipped private hospitals in Australasia.¹¹ They also reflected the objectives set by the institution's administration, namely to ensure that modern diagnostic equipment and therapies were available to increase patronage beyond that which only a health retreat would attract. A further extension, again built in brick, opened in 1933 and added male and female hydrotherapy and massage treatment rooms, another 15 beds for medical patients and 10 beds for obstetric patients.¹²

The types of patients treated at the San between the two world wars were those requiring medical care for acute or chronic conditions, women giving birth, and people in need of a rest. For this latter group, the 'rest cure' was made available. This was a form of therapy advocated by Dr John Harvey Kellogg and to which he devoted a chapter in the fourth edition of his book, *The Art of Massage: A Practical Manual for the Nurse, the Student and the Practitioner*, published in 1923 (previous editions were published in 1895, 1909 and 1919). He explained that "as a therapeutic agent, rest belongs in

the category of natural agents, with exercise, diet, baths etc.”¹³ Chronic pain, fever, haemorrhage, gastric ulcer, addictions, nervous or mental irritability, excitability or exhaustion, diseases peculiar to women, prostatic and bladder disease were some of the conditions which were treated by ‘rest cure’. Other therapies commonly utilized at the San in that era included therapeutic massage, hydrotherapy, and electric therapy. This latter consisted of the application of small, galvanic electric currents of between 20 and 40 mA.

There was a focus on marketing the Sydney Sanitarium as a health retreat or home of health, as illustrated in various advertisements at the time in publications such as newspapers (e.g. *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, *The Brisbane Courier*) and the church paper, *Australasian Record*. Some examples of such advertisements are shown below.

From the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 3 March 1925:

REST AND RECREATION

ISN'T [sic] it time you took a real holiday? How about a couple of weeks at Sydney Sanitarium, Wahroonga, where you can combine rest with recreation?

The Sanitarium is rich in its own home-grown fruits and vegetables. Lovely views and walks; gardens. Tennis and croquet. Only twelve miles from Sydney. Write for booklet. Sanitarium, Wahroonga, NSW.¹⁴

From the *Brisbane Courier*, 2 November 1932:

THE SYDNEY SANITARIUM AND HOSPITAL OFFERS YOU BETTER HEALTH.

(No Mental or Consumptive Cases Admitted)

The most modern methods of medical and surgical practice, combined with special treatments and diet enables the Sanitarium to successfully treat the most difficult cases.

Situated 600 feet above sea level, in the most picturesque, healthful district, near Sydney, the Sanitarium is an ideal sanctuary for those suffering from nervous exhaustion.

Special massage and the application of Electricity in various forms is successfully used for cases of NEURITIS AND NEURASTHENIA [sic].

Whatever your ailment may be, write for advice and illustrated booklet.

NOTE: Patients from Queensland are met on arrival at Hornsby, and conveyed by car to the Sanitarium.

The Manager,
The Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital,
Fox Valley Road
WAHROONGA.

Telephone: Wahroonga 683-684 ¹⁵

However, the San was more than a place where people could choose to go for a relaxing holiday, games of tennis and croquet or walks in the garden, therapeutic though they may have been. It was also a hospital where surgery was performed, acute medical conditions were treated (noting this was in the era before antibiotics) and babies were delivered. Importantly, it was a hospital where nurses were trained. This leads on to the second event in 1919 to which I will give focus.

The Nurse Training Programme Commences

The edition of the *Australasian Record* of June 9, 1919, included an article written by Dr Thomas Sherwin. He had completed his medical training at the University of Sydney and was appointed as the medical superintendent of the Sydney Sanitarium in 1912. His wife, Dr Margherita Freeman, was also a medical graduate of the University of Sydney and she too worked for several years at the San. A large part of Sherwin's article consisted of quoted extracts from Ellen White's *Ministry of Healing* and *Testimonies*, Vols. II, VII & IX, which had a focus on the fact that they were living in the last days. This supported the need to train people in medical missionary work. With the example of Jesus as the great healer and preacher, modes of service closely linking healing and teaching were emphasised. Sherwin announced that, "To give young men and women the training necessary for the work outlined in these testimonies, the Sydney

Sanitarium Training School for Missionary Nurses has been established". He encouraged young people who met the requirements for admission to apply. Applicants were expected to meet the following requisites:

Physical: Good health, strength, and endurance.

Mental: Education equivalent to the preparatory course in the state or our own schools.

Moral: Christian character and full acceptance of all the fundamental teachings of Seventh-day Adventists.¹⁶

Sherwin also listed the subjects the students would study during the three year course:

YEAR & QUARTER	TOPICS	NUMBER OF CLASSES
FIRST YEAR		
First Quarter	Bible	24
	Bible Hygiene [sic]	12
	Practical Nursing	12
	Anatomy and Physiology	24
Second Quarter	Bible	24
	Practical Hydrotherapy	24
	Practical Nursing	12
	Anatomy and Physiology	24
Third Quarter	Bible	24
	Massage	24
	First Aid	12
	Chemistry	12
SECOND YEAR		
First Quarter	Bible	24
	Theoretical Hydrotherapy	12
	Medical Electricity	12
	Cooking	24
Second Quarter	Bible	24
	Medical Nursing	24
	Surgical Nursing	24
	Special Massage and Gymnastics	12

Third Quarter	Bible	24
	Medical Nursing	24
	Surgical Nursing	24
	Obstetrical Nursing	24
THIRD YEAR		
First Quarter	Bible	24
	Obstetrical Nursing	24
	Materia Medica and Dispensing	24
	Laboratory Work	12
Second Quarter	Bible	24
	Hygiene	12
	Diseases of Children	24
	Gynecology [sic] Nursing	12
Third Quarter	Bible	24
	Tropical Diseases	12
	Special Nursing (Eye, Ear, Nose, etc.)	18
	Medical Jurisprudence	6

Each class session was 45 minutes in duration¹⁷ and the list above indicates there was a total of 696 class sessions in the three year course. Dominant in the curriculum was 'Bible' with just over 25% of the class sessions given to that subject. No doubt this was linked to Ellen White's instruction, quoted by Sherwin in his article, to the effect that "nurses who are trained in our institutions are to be fitted up to go out as medical missionary evangelists, uniting the ministry of the Word with that of physical healing".¹⁸ In 1926 Dr Sherwin reported that in four years 42 nurses had graduated from the San with 36 of them going on to work for the SDA organisation.¹⁹ The vision was being realised.

However, also of note in this course was the inclusion of some science topics beyond the expected anatomy and physiology. These were chemistry, medical electricity, materia medica and laboratory work, which would have provided a basic level of scientific awareness for their nursing knowledge, albeit somewhat limited, considering the hours spent on those topics. Massage, taught in the third quarter of the first year, was based on the techniques espoused by Dr John Harvey Kellogg.

Indeed, one of the large textbooks encountered by the young man referred to at the start of this paper was Kellogg's *The Art of Massage. A Practical Manual for the Nurse, the Student and the Practitioner*. The last few pages of the text were titled 'Recent Progress in Massage'. In total, Kellogg made reference to massage treatments used for 24 different health problems. In most instances he referred to articles published in medical or paraprofessional journals such as *The Lancet*, *Metabolism and Practical Medicine*, *Journal of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *New York Medical Journal*, *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, *Berliner Klinische Wochenschrift*, *Marseilles Medical, Bulletin Général de Thérapeutique*, *Gazzetta degli ospedali e delle cliniche*, *Zeitschrift für diätetische und physikalische Therapie*, *Siglo Médico*, *Gazette degli Ospedali*, *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift*, *La Presse Médicale*, *Tablettes Medicales Mobiles* and *Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift*.²⁰

In the early 1920s this would undoubtedly have lent scientific support to the treatments that Kellogg identified in that section of the book. In addition, in several sections throughout the text, he referred to scientific principles, or to experiments which either he or others had conducted, which supported the therapies he was advocating. The following excerpts from his book illustrate this:

Winternitz has shown that under some circumstances heat elimination by the skin may be nearly doubled (increased ninety-five per cent) by friction. He accordingly recommends friction, in connection with the cold bath, for reducing temperature in fevers. . .

Some experiments conducted under the author's direction for the purposes of determining the influence of massage upon the blood, show an increase of from three to seven per cent in the red cells, and from forty to eighty per cent in the white cells. The increase in the blood-count usually became apparent within thirty minutes, and lasted for an hour and a half to two hours. When massage is applied to persons in health, the effect upon the blood-count is, of course, temporary, but when the application is made to persons whose blood-count is deficient, the increase continues for several hours; and if the application is repeated daily, there will be noted a permanent increase in the blood-count from day to day.²¹

Accreditation

The course which commenced in 1919 was three years in length. However, by the late 1920s it had been increased to four years. The major reason for this was to allow the trainee nurses at the San to gain registration with the New South Wales Nurses Registration Board (NRB), as later elaborated. This would provide them with official recognition as trained nurses.

In 1899 the Australian Trained Nurses Association (ATNA) was formed by a group of nurses and doctors throughout Australia. Part of their commitment was “to establish a system of registration for trained nurses”,²² but the ATNA was a voluntary body without a legislative mandate. However, it took on the role of granting certificates to nurses who had completed a minimum of three years’ training in a course at a recognised training hospital with approved subjects.²³ Over the first few decades of the twentieth century the various state governments in Australia gradually passed legislation to establish Nurse Registration Boards which took over the regulatory functions of ATNA, but with the benefit of having legal authority.

The New South Wales (NSW) Parliament passed the Nurses Registration Act in 1924 and the NRB became fully operational in 1926. It had the authority to conduct examinations which trained nurses needed to pass in order to have their names listed on the register of qualified nurses, and to issue certificates of registration to those so qualified.²⁴ The Sydney Sanitarium was amongst the first group of training schools in NSW to receive a certificate from the NRB approving it as a Training School for general nurses. The certificate was signed on the 1st January 1927 and it identified the training period as four years.²⁵ The minimum years of training required was determined by the NRB and ranged from three to five years, depending on the average daily bed occupancy at the hospital.²⁶

The training the San nurses undertook went beyond the minimum requirements set down by the NRB, which mandated that a three year course had to include at least 12 lectures in the following topics: anatomy and physiology, general nursing (as well as 12 demonstrations), medical nursing, surgical nursing and invalid cookery. Additionally there had to be at least six lectures in hygiene

and infection.²⁷ When compared with the Sydney Sanitarium Training School for Missionary Nurses course set up in 1919, previously described in this paper, the topics which the San nurses studied over and above the minimum required by the NRB were Bible, theoretical hydrotherapy, medical electricity, massage and gymnastics, obstetrical nursing, Materia Medica and dispensing, laboratory work, diseases of children, tropical diseases and medical jurisprudence. Additionally, they had more hours than the minimum required in several areas, including anatomy and physiology.²⁸ However, because of the San's high proportion of "rest cure" patients and its comparatively low daily average occupancy by "serious" patients requiring medical or surgical nursing care, the NRB required the student nurses to undertake four years of training, so the course was extended from its previous three years, with the final year spent in revision.²⁹ Further adjustments made by the NRB to curriculum requirements impacted the course at the San in the mid to late 1930s. This included the requirement that male students not undertake gynaecology lectures but instead study "male urology and venereal disease." Further, it was specified that all students must obtain experience in the operating theatres, stipulated in 1939 as being a minimum of 40 days.³⁰

The first San nurses who sat the NRB examination graduated in 1928. They were Dorothy Chapman, Florence Delaney, Myrtle Speck and Pearl Speck.³¹ It is of significance to point out that they were all women even though there were a number of young men who were undertaking nurse training at the San. For example, there were nine nurse graduates in 1926, five of whom were men, which meant the graduation class was composed of more men than women.³²

The young man mentioned in the introduction completed his course in 1928, the same year the first four ladies from the San sat the NRB examination. However, he and his male classmate were unable to gain registration, not because they had failed, but because at the time male nurses were unable to register as general nurses with the NRB. Although the San recognised the training given, and graduated him with a certificate of nurse training, he did not have the same opportunity to sit the Board's examination as his female counterparts, and so gain official state recognition as a general nurse. Many of the men who chose to train as nurses at the San in this era did so as part of their preparation for medical mission work, especially those who felt a

calling to go to the Pacific Islands. Some followed this calling, while others became evangelists, pastors and church administrators; several of them were later ordained. While at this stage of the San's history the male students were unable to register as trained nurses, they did receive extra training in one particular skill with which the female students were not provided. This was in the area of homiletics, although it was not referred to as such. They were trained in the art of sermon preparation and preaching and the young man from the dairy farm who had a desire to serve in the mission field would go down behind Dog's Head Rock to practise his sermon, and then walk to the railway station and catch the steam train on Sabbath mornings to wherever he had been assigned to deliver it.³³

Conclusion

So what became of this young man, son of a dairy farmer? As you may have anticipated, he married the young woman, daughter of the builder from Victoria, who also had a desire to train as a nurse and serve in the mission field. And certainly, if this was a fairy-tale that is how you would expect the story to go. But it is not a fairy-tale, it is a true story. As it transpired, although they had two separate calls to go into mission service, they were unable to do so because the young woman did not pass her health checks. Illness had prevented her from being part of the first group to sit the NRB exams and become a registered nurse. Unfortunately, her health challenges continued to the extent she had to remain living in Australia.

However, that did not negate their important contribution to mission service. They had two daughters who both served extensively in mission service through the South Pacific and Africa. The young man was Richmond Hill, the young lady, Leila Boehm. Their elder daughter, Ruth, married Ray Wilkinson and together they served in mission service in education throughout the South Pacific for 37 years. Their younger daughter, Lola, served as a nurse in Africa for 12 years and the South Pacific for seven years. Although Richmond and Leila were themselves unable to fulfil their dreams of mission service, their daughters had a profound impact in health ministry: Ruth by teaching many students in the South Pacific the principles of good nutrition and health and also by training home economics teachers; Lola by training midwives in Africa and many nurses in Papua New

Guinea. After graduating, Richmond did literature evangelism work in Victoria for 6 months then became a team member with various evangelists until 1931, when he was requested to return to the San to work in the treatment rooms and as a relief radiographer. He worked at the Sydney San for 17 years, during which time he registered as a physiotherapist. He transferred to the Warburton San and worked in the treatment rooms there for seven years before leaving to work as a physiotherapist in both private practice and the public hospital sector until his retirement. Over several decades, both he and Leila made years of important contributions at their local churches in a voluntary capacity.

In the era between the two world wars, the administrators of the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital were desirous that it be a facility which put the health principles espoused by Ellen White at the forefront and which trained young people to minister in health. However, alongside this objective they also worked to make it a first-class hospital. This was crucial to their aspiration to set up a training school for nurses, and to progress it in order to gain registration with the NRB. This goal was met. The hospital and the training school have been consistently held in high regard, both by those medical doctors who have referred patients to the facility and by the community at large. It is also evident that in their endeavours to implement a nurse training program which would attract recognition by state authorities, those charged with overseeing the daily operations of the institution and the strategic expansion of its facilities did not lose their focus on serving the church's work and mission.

Notes and References

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