

Florence Nightingale's letter to *The Times* on 'Trained Nurses for the Sick Poor' (extracts)

The beginning has been made, the first crusade has been fought and won, to bring [...] real nursing, trained nursing [...] to the bedsides of cases wanting real nursing among the London sick poor, in the only way in which real nurses can be so brought to the sick poor, and this by providing a real home within reach of their work for the nurses to live in—a home which gives what real family homes are supposed to give:—materially, a bedroom for each, dining and sitting rooms in common, all meals prepared and eaten in the home; morally, direction, support, sympathy in a common work, further training and instruction in it, proper rest and recreation, and a head of the home, who is also and pre-eminently trained and skilled head of the nursing[...]

[N]ursing requires the most undivided attention of anything I know, and all the health and strength both of mind and body [...] The very thing that we find in these poor sick is that they lose the feeling of what it is to be clean. The district nurse has to show them their room clean for once—in other words, to do it herself; to sweep and dust away, to empty and wash out all the appalling dirt and foulness; to air and disinfect; rub the windows, sweep the fireplace, carry out and shake the bits of old sacking and carpet, and lay them down again; fetch fresh water and fill the kettle; wash the patient and the children, and make the bed. Every home she has thus cleaned has always been kept so. She found it a pigsty, she left it a tidy, airy room.

[...] In another case, the mother had been two years in bed. The place was a den of foulness. One could cut the air with a knife. The nurse employed two of the little children to collect the foul litter and dirty linen from under the bed and sort it, emptied utensils which had not been emptied for a fortnight (this is common), cleaned the grate, and carried away the caked ashes, washed the children, combed and cleansed their hair, crowded with vermin. Next day the eldest girl, of eight, had scoured the place, and, perched on a three-legged stool, was trying to wash the dirty linen with her poor little thin arms.

[...] A first beginning has been made to give to the district London nurse the real help and the real home which are the secret of the success of active religious sisterhoods abroad, together with the real independence, enterprise, indomitable self-reliance, capability of training all the powers to the best efficiency, which are the secret of the success of the highest British character, and all of which are wanted in the crusade against dirt and fever nests—the crusade to let light and air and cleanliness into the worst rooms of the worst places of sick London.

[...] The present Association wants to foster the spirit of work (not relief) in the district nurse, and for her to foster the same in her sick poor.

[...] If a hospital must first of all be a place which shall do the sick no harm, how much more must the sick poor's room be made a place not to render impossible recovery from the sickness which it has probably bred? This is

what the London District Nurses do; they nurse the room as well as the patient, and teach the family to nurse the room.

[...] Hospitals are but an intermediate stage of civilization. At present, hospitals are the only place where the sick poor can be nursed, or, indeed, often the sick rich. But the ultimate object is to nurse all sick at home.

[...] The district nurse costs money, and the district homes cost money. Each district nurse must have, before she is qualified—1, a month's trial in district work; 2, a year's training in hospital nursing; 3, three months' training in district nursing, under the Superintendent-General [...] For anything like a "National," or even a "Metropolitan" concern, a capital of £20,000 and an income of £5,000 a year are wanted. Of this a great part is wanted at once, to set on foot three district homes; to pay and maintain their superintendents, nurses, and probationers; to create a hospital training school in which to train.

What has been done at present is to establish [one district home](#) (which it is hoped will be the central home of many other districts) under the charge and training of Miss Florence Lees, as Superintendent-General, with five hospital trained nurses and three nurse candidates, and to carry on the previously existing work of the East London Nursing Society with six nurses.

The Central Home was opened at 23, [Bloomsbury-square](#), in December last, the nursing work having been begun in the neighbourhood from a temporary abode, in July. The Nightingale Training School at St Thomas's Hospital is at present giving the year's hospital training to six, to be increased to 12, admitted candidates.

[...] I ask the public not to add one more charity or relief agency to the many that are already, but to support a charity—truly "metropolitan" in its scope, and truly "national" if carried out—which never has been before. [...]

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

(*The Times*, 14 April 1876)