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Their Health in Her Hands

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LEADING mothers and children to health is the job of Dorothy Beisner, nutrition graduate of '31. Dorothy is a public health nutritionist for the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago. That’s a long impressive title, but every word of it spells hours of fascinating work.

Dorothy says, “I am responsible for the nutrition work in eight infant welfare clinics. These clinics are in the slum area of Chicago. Right now I have 250 patients, whom I see once each month. I calculate all special diets ordered by the doctors and am nutrition consultant and teacher to the nurses.”

When the nurse finds a family with poor nutrition, Dorothy takes over. She helps the mother plan well balanced, inexpensive meals. “That’s where meal planning and home management courses really come in handy,” says Dorothy.

When asked about the types of families she visits, Dorothy answered, “The families are of every nationality and race. Some of their flats are amazingly clean and neat. But, as one might expect, many are ‘smelly,’ dirty, and full of rats.”

“When a child is sick, I must tell the mother what to do and decide whether or not the symptoms indicate a doctor is necessary. Mothers pour out all sorts of problems to me... especially those concerning marital difficulties and children’s behavior.”

“If a patient has deep-seated emotional problems, these must be dealt with before he can follow a diet. A record of clinic visits and home calls is kept for each patient. Special problems and recommendations are written here. These chart records are confidential and available only to staff members.”

Dorothy’s college courses in dietetics and infant nutrition are used over and over again since the majority of her cases involve pre-school feeding problems. She relates, “Many of the children refuse to eat or have poor appetites. Others have perverted tastes for such things as coal, wood, sand and ashes. I see many cases of malnutrition, rickets, and anemia.” It’s the nutritionist’s job to motivate these children to eat and correct their malnutrition.

“Psychic income is high in this job,” according to this new public health nutritionist. “Watching the progress of some of these poverty-stricken people gives great satisfaction. Most of them cooperate well and are eager to learn. I feel this most when I work with mothers on meal planning and marketing.”

Not only does Dorothy teach the patients, but the patients teach her. She says, “I’ve learned so much about nationality and racial food customs. Also, from patients’ questions I learn better methods of teaching others.”

Since 1911 the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago has said to mothers and little children, “Come with me; I’ll show you the way to health.” Dorothy Beisner is using her training in nutrition to help the society show these people the way to health.