

HISTORICAL ORTHOPAEDIC ARTEFACTS FACT SHEET No 4

Girdlestone 'mermaid' night splint



This night splint was originally devised by Surgeon GR Girdlestone, who was associated with the work of Sir Robert Jones and Dame Agnes Hunt at Baschurch, and subsequently founded the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre at Oxford.

It was a simple yet effective night splint for use in the treatment of knock-knee deformity. Causes of this condition include bad posture and gait, flat-foot, rickets, and poliomyelitis, but the cause of a large number of cases is unknown.

Treatment was determined by cause and by degree of deformity. Attention to general health and nutrition was required, with avoidance of fatigue and over exertion. Mild cases required inside raising to the heels of the shoes and exercises. The altered shoes were to be worn exclusively during the day and weight-bearing without the shoes was not permitted.

The device consists of two metal gutter splints fixed back to back and padded with felt. The upper end of the splint is wider than the lower end, and it extends from groin to heel. It was used only in bed and usually for a child who was wearing altered shoes in the day as described above.

The splint was placed between the child's legs, a firm pad of wool was placed between the inner side of the knee joint and the splint and the straps were fastened. The legs were covered with a piece of splint-wool and a firm bandage was applied around both legs and the splint between them. The bandage had to extend to the groin and include the foot to the toes. It was essential that the legs and feet lay exactly parallel to each other and that the feet and knee caps pointed straight forwards.

Sources

1. Birpuri, SS. Principles and practice of nursing. 2nd ed. Jaypee Brothers, 2012, p 376-377
2. Powell, M. Orthopaedic nursing. 6th ed. Livingstone, 1968, p 80, 309
3. Roaf, R & Hodkinson, LJ. The Oswestry textbook for orthopaedic nurses. Pitman, 1963, p 306