

HISTORICAL FACTSHEET No 20

The After-Care Scheme

In her autobiography, Agnes Hunt says that it was maddening to send a child home, walking in splints, only for it to return six months later with a broken splint and in worse condition than before, due to parents' ignorance. Continuity of care for discharged patients was vital if the best treatment results were to be achieved. The first After-Care clinic was therefore set up in a private house in Shrewsbury in 1910. Every month, voluntary workers collected ex-patients from the surrounding area, and Agnes Hunt and Emily Goodford drove their pony and trap to the house, where they examined some 20 to 30 patients, scrutinising splints, assessing progress, and taking back with them any child who was not improving.

By 1918, it had become apparent that a dedicated After-Care Sister was needed, and Miss Jessie Brown was appointed to oversee clinics at Shrewsbury, Wellington and Bridgnorth. Within a short time, centres were also established at Craven Arms, Ludlow, Ironbridge, Oakengates, Oswestry, Wem, Whitchurch and Market Drayton, and it was necessary to employ an assistant for Miss Brown. By the end of 1918, 13 centres across Shropshire were visited once a week by an After-Care Sister, and all who did not attend were visited in their own homes. Jessie Brown first travelled to her clinics on a second-hand Douglas motorbike, which she learned to ride for the job. One nurse trained at Oswestry, Hilda Arthur, later recalled that she had looked forward to a post as After-Care Sister because she wanted to ride a motorbike! However, by the time she qualified in the mid-1920s, cars had come into use instead.

Under Agnes Hunt's influence, similar After-Care schemes were set up at orthopaedic centres all over the British Isles and abroad. By 1935, when an appeal for the hospital rebuilding programme was launched, there were 35 After-Care clinics spreading over eight counties: Shropshire, Herefordshire, Cheshire, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Merionethshire, Montgomeryshire and Radnorshire. Voluntary After-Care Committees raised funds and provided helpers for the regular visits by orthopaedic surgeons and nurses. Some of the clinics were held in unusual places, such as the Territorial Army Hall and Museum in Shrewsbury, and the former Hereford Gaol.

Over the years, as the nature of treatment for orthopaedic conditions changed, so the need for an After-Care system gradually diminished, and was eventually phased out, to be taken over by other community health care services. The last After-Care Superintendent, Mrs Paddy Hughes, retired in 1992 after 40 years service.

After-Care Superintendents 1919 – 1992

Miss A.E. Sankey	1919 - 1939
Miss Mona Williams	1939 - 1966
Miss Eileen Walton	1966 - 1967
Mrs Elizabeth 'Paddy' Hughes	1967 - 1992

Sources

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2. *Carter, Marie. Healing & hope: 100 years of 'The Orthopaedic'. Oswestry: The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital NHS Trust, 2000, p 23, 76*
3. *Hospital Annual Report 1918, p 5*
4. *The Heritage of Oswestry: the origin and development of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, Oswestry 1900-1975, p 67-9*
5. *The Agnes Hunt Appeal for Cripples. [Leaflet], 1935*
6. *Talkback: a newsletter for the staff of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital No 9 June 1992, p 4*
7. *Board of Management Committee 28 January 1939 minute 7*
8. *Orthopaedic Illustrated No 7 1966, p 11; No 8 1967, p 11*