

The History of St. Helena Hospital

Chapter VII

Water, Nutrition, and Pure Fresh Air—Early Treatment Modalities

WATER: “Water is without doubt the most ancient of all remedial agents for disease.” Thus begins the voluminous textbook *Rational Hydrotherapy*, published in 1902 and written by John Harvey Kellogg, M.D. He notes that in ancient times hydrotherapy was used among the Egyptians, Chinese and other ancient nations. “According to a Chinese record dating back several centuries before Christ, a physician prescribed for a woman of that country one hundred affusions of ice-water, each followed by wrapping in a linen sheet.”

Inside the front cover of this 1,193 page tome, which has been stored in the St. Helena Hospital Vault for years, is written the following inscription: “Dr. Ida S. Nelson, Feb. 1, 1903.” Dr. Ida was a much-loved physician here at the “San” around the turn of the century. As you leaf through the volume, you find where she has underlined portions of the text in pencil and her handwritten notes in the margins. Detailed instructions are given for the preparation and administration of hundreds of treatments by Dr. Kellogg.

The St. Helena Sanitarium was famous for its pure water, which flowed from Crystal Springs, and people came from near and far to receive the treatments provided by the Sanitarium staff. Hot and cold baths and showers, sheet wraps, sitz baths, steam baths, cold-mitten friction massages, hot fomentations, and neutral baths (water temperature of 93-95 degrees) were among some of the many treatments administered for the relief of everything from headaches and gout to dyspepsia, arthritis and rheumatism.

Ellen White also had some interesting comments to make on the use of water in treating illness: “In health and in sickness, pure water is one of heaven’s choicest blessings. Its proper use promotes health. The external application of water is one of the easiest and most satisfactory ways of regulating the circulation of the blood. A cold or cool bath is an excellent tonic. Warm baths open the pores and thus aid in the elimination of impurities. Both warm and neutral baths soothe the nerves and equalize the circulation.

“But many have never learned by experience the beneficial effects of the proper use of water, and they are afraid of it. Water treatments are not appreciated as they should be, and to apply them skillfully requires work that many are unwilling to perform. . . There are many ways in which water can be applied to relieve pain and check disease.”

The Lloyd Building was built in 1905 and was equipped for hydrotherapy. Tiled floors and walls were supplied with plumbing and fixtures for providing multiple-head showers, sitz baths, massage rooms, and hot, cold or neutral baths. Treatments were provided for men on the third floor and women on the fourth. Nursing students were well-trained in the administration of hydrotherapy and massage.

NUTRITION was also an important part of the treatment process at the Sanitarium. Ellen White’s words on nutrition were taken to heart in preparing menus at the Sanitarium. “Grains, fruits, nuts and vegetables constitute the diet chosen for us by our Creator.”

“These foods, prepared in as simple and natural a manner as possible, are the most healthful and nourishing. They impart a strength, a power of endurance, and a vigor of intellect that are not afforded by a more complex and stimulating diet.” A vegetarian lifestyle was adopted and served to guests without apology.

The bakery and health food factory produced whole-grain breads, crackers, and “gems”—a

type of biscuit made without baking soda or baking powder (substances known to be irritating to the stomach). Meat substitutes such as Nuttolene, made from ground peanuts and grains, were served in the place of animal protein.

Guests at the Sanitarium found the menu lacking in other items besides meat: no coffee, tea, pepper, mustard, vinegar, or sugar-filled desserts were served either.

PURE FRESH AIR was plentiful in the Napa Valley. The beautiful surroundings and view from the Sanitarium were healing in themselves. The grounds were like a large park, with a great expanse of lawn edged with rock gardens and flower beds. Many of the plants and rock walls were installed by patients who were able to work out-of-doors as part of their treatment. This form of treatment was recommended by Ellen White: "To the chronic invalid, nothing so tends to restore health and happiness as living amid attractive country surroundings. Here the most helpless ones can sit or lie in the sunshine or in the shade of the trees. Plans should be devised for keeping patients out of doors. Encourage them to breathe the fresh air. Teach them to breathe deeply, and in breathing and speaking to exercise the abdominal muscles. This is an education that will be invaluable to them. Exercise in the open air should be prescribed as a life-giving necessity. And for such exercises there is nothing better than the cultivation of the soil. Let patients have flower beds to care for, or work to do in the orchard or vegetable garden. As they are encouraged to leave their rooms and spend time in the open air, cultivating flowers or doing some other light, pleasant work, their attention will be diverted from themselves and their sufferings."

So, with all this water, healthy food, and outdoor exercise, how did patients feel about these radical treatment methods? One guest of the St. Helena Sanitarium and Hospital in the summer of 1940, Fred Hutchinson, wrote a number of letters to relatives describing his two-week stay here. His letters were published in a little booklet entitled *Wanderings in a Wheelchair*. Here are a few excerpts of what he had to say about the food, treatments and surroundings:

"If you have a good stomach and are hungry you might find something you like; so far I haven't, but the soups are good and they go in for vegetables in a big way. A few of the odd ones are: creamed cucumbers, buttered celery, baked carrots. So far as the food is concerned, you can have anything but tea, coffee, meat, sugar, cookies and other sweets. You can have all the Savory Bits you like—flaxseed no end; almond butter if you're good, and Brewer's Yeast whether you like it or not.

"If you have ever had a massage you can picture what it is like in the treatment rooms—it's made up of small dressing rooms, massage rooms with tables upon which you lie, hot rooms, baths of all sorts and showers of every description. Chester is to give me my treatment—he gets two or three fomentations (you know, the hot pads) and he puts one under my upper back and another under my lower back. They wrap around the body and cover the shoulders and the hips. Then he puts my feet in a hot tub of water. This goes on two or three times and then I'm ripe for the massage.

"The massage is preceded by either an alcohol rub or a shower; then he works out on the arms, legs, feet, stomach and back. It feels fine and takes about an hour. Miller then rolls me up to the top of the building for a sun bath. Today it was lovely, like frying a hot dog—10 minutes on one side and then 10 minutes on the other.

"Now it's time to go to bed—Jeeves draws my bath. It must be just right, about 102 or 103 degrees. I soak for five or six minutes—I don't want to get hard boiled—and so it goes. A rub down with salve. Fine stuff, but expensive, so don't use too much. Then into bed and perhaps to sleep.

"At last you fall asleep and dream of a big, thick steak smothered in onions, french fried potatoes, or perhaps oysters or a lobster Newberg, wine with dinner, coffee, cake and a good cigar. It's too much; you awake with indigestion and then you can think of your savory bits and Brewer's Yeast and the wonderful spinach tin balls and you are carried away in the arms of Morpheus once more."

The next year Mr. Hutchinson returned to the St. Helena Sanitarium and penned these words to his friend, Tiby: “If there is anything prettier than the Napa Valley in the late summer, it’s the Napa valley in the spring with wild flowers in bloom. From my comfortable chair on the cool porch I command a beautiful view of the valley. I wish you were here. The treatments would do you good, and the food is full of vitamins. Here at the ‘San’ they sit up nights figuring out new ways to make you healthy and happy.” Obviously, Mr. Hutchinson was a very happy guest! He returned several more times and brought his family!

Sources: *Rational Hydrotherapy*, J.H. Kellogg; *Ministry of Healing*, E.G. White, *Wanderings in a Wheelchair*, F. Hutchinson