

CANADA

In an article which appeared in the May 1974 issue of "International Review", Mrs. Helen G. McArthur, one of the recipients of the Florence Nightingale Medal in 1957 and former National Director of Nursing Services of the Canadian Red Cross, described the splendid work carried out by Red Cross nurses among remote communities throughout Canada over a period spanning more than half a century. An account of the pioneering activities of those nurses, in which they showed and continue to show so much energy and courage, is given in an article which we reproduce below, originally printed in Despatch (Vol. 37, 1976), the Canadian National Society's periodical:

Good health, a strong back and the desire to help suffering people are the attributes of all nurses, but a lust for high adventure, inordinate self-reliance and a consuming determination to take help to sufferers must be what have motivated Red Cross nurses to seek service in outpost hospitals and nursing stations.

In 1920, after the Great War, large numbers of ex-servicemen settled in the prairie provinces. At the same time there was a massive wave of immigration from Europe. It became apparent that many of the pioneer districts of Canada were lacking in medical and nursing care.

"Follow Through" was the Red Cross keynote for immigrants from 1920 on. Red Cross had Seaport "nurseries" in Quebec, Halifax and Saint John where a warm welcome was given to those just arriving on Canadian soil. There were facilities for rest, food for the weary travellers, and advice and assistance to guide them. Red Cross even had stations at the Canadian National/CP Railway for settlers awaiting trains for parts unknown in the inland provinces. As well as food and comfort, their stations included wash-rooms and playrooms, essential to the many large families of immigrants. Forty outpost hospitals and nursing stations then served the settlers, both foreign immigrants and ex-servicemen, who arrived at isolated points in northern Canada.

Artists picture the charms of the wilderness; writers exult in the joys of the outdoor life, but for the outpost nurses, the life is often a battle with the elements and provides little time for contemplation. That is probably the reason why any but factual reports of their "adventures" are written by someone else! Their 24 hour days are more likely crammed with the answering of distress calls from all places, getting to their patients by any means available, contacting doctors, arranging transport to in-town hospitals for the seriously ill, and once back at the station, holding clinics for inoculations and medication, giving first aid, and checking on supplies.

Even in 1922, there were "mobile clinics"—brave groups of antiquated looking autos marked with a Red Cross and "womanned" by starchy, full-skirted angels of mercy. By 1946, mobiles were often well-equipped railway cars. Today, however, the local community hospital fulfills these needs.

It has been the policy of Red Cross to transfer the outposts to the communities as soon as they felt they could manage them, and to set up other posts in remote areas where a need was apparent. With the inauguration of provincial health plans in 1958, one after another, district hospitals and nursing stations became funded and then run by the provinces. Today, only the ten hospitals in Ontario remain. There are, however, six nursing stations in B.C. and four in New Brunswick. In all cases these are operated by Red Cross at the request of the provincial governments.

Outpost hospitals and nursing stations have come a long way since 1920. Rural areas have become more urbanized, living and transport have improved, provincial medical services have brightened the picture, but in a land as vast as Canada, there will always be "remote" places, and therefore always a haven of hope where phones ring busily and people wait anxiously. Last year, 8,584 patients were admitted, while 40,385 were treated on an out-patient basis.