

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

and ethical codes. She may not divulge information contained in individual employee health records unless the employee gives his signed permission. The files are only accessible to medical personnel, hence the nurse usually maintains them. She should not, however, accept employment that requires her to assume responsibility for service outside the sphere of her professional training and experience.

According to *The Legal Scope of Industrial Nursing Practice*, a statement published by the American Medical Association in 1959:

"Courts have held that professional nurses have a legal duty to interpret evidence presented by the patient possibly indicating the need for medical attention, and to proceed in the light of that interpretation to do what is required for the patient, as for example the need to call a physician, to discontinue a treatment where there is evidence of its harmful effect, e.g., on an unconscious patient, or to determine the patient's need for special medication, e.g., sedatives. There can be little doubt that by custom and usage the relationship between doctor, patient, and nurse is one in which the parties recognize that the nurse as well as the physician has the function and responsibility to observe and interpret the patient's reactions."

"In emergency cases, industrial nurses have a duty to determine the need for prompt medical attention, to make a tentative diagnosis of the patient's condition, and to employ necessary resuscitative and first-aid measures."

First Aid

Definition and limitations In many small organizations and in field operations, it is neither practical nor justifiable to have qualified professional medical personnel available. In such cases, the best arrangement is a suitable first-aid kit or a station administered by trained lay first-aid attendants who follow procedures and treatments outlined by a doctor. The doctor should be available on an on-call or referral basis to take care of injuries not of a minor nature.

It should be noted that in some jurisdictions injured employees have their choice of a physician. In such cases, the employer should comply with this request, if possible.

At this point it is well to recognize that

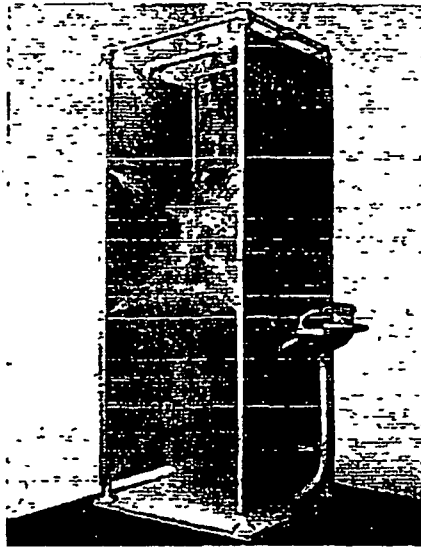


Fig 38-4. Combination emergency shower and eye-wash fixture

Courtesy Speakman Company

there are really two kinds of first aid. One is emergency treatment—according to the American Red Cross first-aid textbook, "First aid is the immediate, temporary treatment given in the case of accident or sudden illness before the services of a physician can be secured." Proper first-aid measures reduce suffering and place the injured person in a physician's hands in a better condition to receive subsequent treatment. The duty of a person giving first aid ends where that of the physician begins.

The other kind of first aid is the prompt attention given to injuries, such as cuts, scratches, bruises, and burns, which are usually so minor that the injured person would not ordinarily seek medical attention. Whether these wounds heal satisfactorily depends on proper care immediately after injury and subsequently. This is probably the appropriate place to point out that lay treatment is too frequently *overtreatment*, which can have results as bad as carelessness or neglect.

The requirement that all employees re-