

PROGRESS OF THE MEDICAL-NURSING PROGRAM IN ABSCO

by

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To give you a complete picture of Brake Shoe's medical-nursing program, we need to go back 35 years and to the American Manganese Steel plant in Chicago Heights. In 1918 a nurse was hired at that plant. Mrs. Price was a practical nurse rather than a registered graduate nurse and worked for us some fifteen years with one break in service.

In those days most nurses in industry-and there were about 1200 - were expected to take care of injured employees and that was all. But Mrs. Price made home visits to sick and injured employees as well as doing first aid at the plant. She also fitted safety shoes and helped where she could to improve safety in the plant.

There were no further developments in our medical-nursing program until 1933 when Dr. Geraldine Cowle was hired as our company doctor. Her work was limited almost completely to conditions of the chest because of the alleged silicosis cases pending against the Company at the time.

Dr. Cowle who is now Dr. Pederson-Krag tells us she first went to Chicago Heights where she took her own x-rays, developed them and did examinations. She also talked to the employees regarding their chest conditions. While working alone, she could complete only seven cases a day. She was then given three assistants and was able to increase the number to thirty a day.

Later Dr. Cowle followed the same procedure at twenty-five other Brake Shoe foundries where there was a possibility of silica exposure. You will be interested to know that Dr. Cowle told Mr. Gresh she found very little silicosis in our employees except when they had previously worked in the mines. For the six years previous to Dr. Cowle's resigning from Brake Shoe, she worked only part time reviewing x-rays and examinations that were sent to our New York Office.

The second World War brought a sudden increase in industrial nurses everywhere and 1941 was an important year for Brake Shoe's nursing program. Dr. Hamlin was employed then as our medical director and was given the job of setting up a company-wide medical program. The Industrial Hygiene Department was also started in 1941 with Mr. John Littlefield in charge. He was succeeded by our present Chief Industrial Hygienist, Mr. Weber. Then, as now, the Hygiene Laboratory was an integral part of the Medical Department under Dr. Hamlin's supervision. And last but not least by any means, the first registered graduate nurse was hired in that year. She is still with us - Louise Mathews of Amsco, Chicago Heights.

It was a most propitious beginning to what was to become one of the most progressive and best known industrial medical programs in the country.