A NOTE ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF ANÆSTHETICS
BY NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS OF THE ROYAL
ARMY MEDICAL CORPS.

BY CAPTAIN F. E. GUNTER.
Royal Army Medical Corps.

After reading the recent Circular of the Director General
re instructions and practice in the administration of anæsthetics, it
struck me that, after all, is it imperative that anæsthetics be given
by officers? Could not the duty be equally well performed by reliable
and trained Non-Commissioned Officers? I knew that this was done
in the American Army for I had assisted at operations in which
chloroform was given by the hospital steward. To ascertain if it was
usual for Non-Commissioned Officers to give anæsthetics in foreign
armies, I sent round a circular to the various Legation Guards
here (Peking), asking if chloroform was given by subordinates and,
if so, did they receive any special training? In reply to this, the
French, Russians, Italians and Austrians, said that no one but duly
qualified doctors were permitted to give anæsthetics. The Americans
replied, on the other hand, that all men are trained for that purpose,
and the Germans and Japanese replied that they train their Non-
Commissioned Officers. They are permitted to give anæsthetics,
but only in the presence of a Medical Officer. The advantage of
Non-Commissioned Officers being eligible for the administration of
anæsthetics is obvious. It often happens that in small stations there
is only one Medical Officer. He must, in such a case, call in the aid
of a civilian if an anæsthetic is required. This gentleman may not be
at once available and dangerous delay may occur. Again, supposing
there are two. It would in many cases be most desirable that an
assistant be available for the operation, and the Medical Officer
would probably be of greater assistance than a Non-Commissioned
Officer. In the larger hospitals it would not be so important, but
granted that Non-Commissioned Officers are permitted to give
anæsthetics in the smaller hospitals—if the principle be right, then
they might equally logically be permitted to give them in the larger
hospitals. There is no legal objection that I am aware of. Second
year's students give anæsthetics constantly in Edinburgh and else-
where, and our Non-Commissioned Officers are, as a rule, more
reliable men than junior students. I think the American plan of
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training all men is undesirable. I think that specially reliable Non-Commissioned Officers should be chosen from the nursing section and trained for this duty. The training could, I suppose, be carried out efficiently at our larger Military Hospitals, such as Netley, Aldershot, Woolwich; or better, perhaps, arrangements might be made for them to attend a large civil hospital for this purpose. At the end of the course they should go through a searching examination and then should receive a certificate stating that they are qualified as anaesthetists. The course, in fact, should exactly correspond with that which medical students have to attend in anaesthetics before receiving their diplomas.