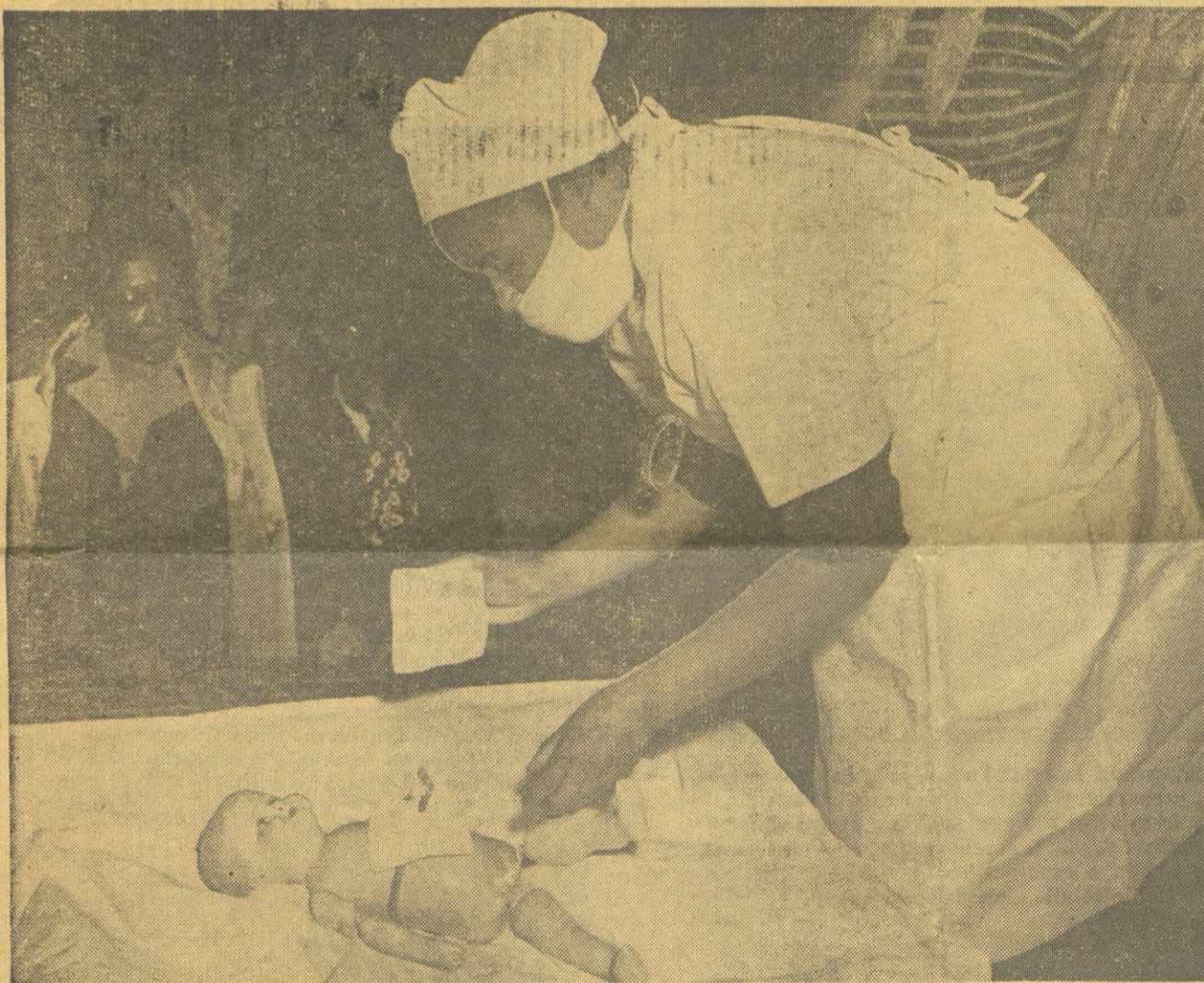


State's Midwife Schools Win U. N. Recognition



Nurse Hale demonstrating the cutting and dressing of a baby's cord with Midwife Virginia Day and other members of a West Memphis class observing. This is "Baby Chase," whose model mother of adult size, called "Mrs. Chase," with all the requirements for such a demonstration, is also used in the deliveries before class assemblies.

Instructor in Midwifery for Negroes Enjoying Fellowship Study as United Nation's Guest.

By CLAIRE N. MOODY.

IT WAS IN 1942 that the State Board of Health decided to try a new approach to the problem of its women, especially among the Negroes, who were going through the ordeal of childbirth with no attention at all, or only the very little that could be given by "grannies" or inexperienced midwives. Since the custom of midwifery is the normal one, obviously the thing to do was to improve the method of training and supervising of midwives.

A committee from the State Medical Society suggested using a Negro nurse especially trained in obstetrics, or nurse-midwifery. No one was immediately available but the name of Nurse Mamie O. Hale, who, at that time, was on the staff of Public Health Association in Pittsburgh, Pa., was proposed. A conference was arranged in the spring of 1942 and Nurse Hale came down to Little Rock to look over the situation and give the state health officer and the supervisor of public health nursing a chance to meet her. Nurse Hale's pleasing personality and evident ability to learn made a favorable impression and she was offered the job. However, before reporting for work in the state, she was sent to Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Ala., for six months' of study in midwifery. Upon her return, she was placed in Crittenden county as nurse-midwife and general public health nurse. During the time she remained in this county, she was kept busy advising mothers on child care, giving prenatal instruction to expectant mothers, and when it was an uncomplicated birth, delivering babies.

In 1945, Nurse Hale became consultant in midwifery on the nursing staff of the State Board of Health. A high sounding title that carries lots of work with it.

In talking with Nurse Hale, several things are apparent. One notices a verve, enthusiasm and deep interest in her work. The radiance of service is in her face—a tenderness of character that cannot be assumed but is a constant steady glow from within.

Nurse Hale is also a teacher. Her schools are well planned, especially in the delta counties, where the Negro population is greatest and where about three-fourths of the midwives live on plantations. It often becomes necessary to convince the "boss man" that a midwife must be away. In that event, Nurse Hale gives her student a "strip" as a letter of explanation about the meeting, is called. Usually the overseer is familiar with what is taking place because he has already received a letter of explanation about the school from the State Department of Health. This is followed by an invitation from the county health department to visit the school

Later, invitations are sent out to attend graduation exercises. This is a big occasion when everyone brings lunch and an all-day affair is made of it.

After the director's address and the solemn pledge, each midwife, who has successfully completed the course of training, receives a permit to practice for the current year.

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During the four to six weeks the women have been attending the school, Nurse Hale has been teaching them by example—over and over and over again. These Negro women, who have been midwives for more years than Nurse Hale has encompassed in her life span, are not easy to teach. It has been up to her to tell them and show them and

TO NURSE-MIDWIFE MAMIE O. HALE, consultant in midwifery of the Arkansas State Board of Health, has come an unique honor. She has been allotted one of the two fellowships given to nurses this year by the World Health Organization, a branch of the United Nations.

Nurse Hale is spending three months in study and comparison of midwifery in England, Holland, Sweden, Norway and Finland. From the time she reached New York until her return to this country in the early fall, all expenses are being met by the World Health Organization.

The honor came through her success in conducting the midwifery schools, which are a part of the Arkansas State Board of Health's broad educational program.

make them like it so well they will remain for the whole course and take as much pride in getting a permit to practice midwifery as if it had been their own idea in the first place. She has to adopt some unorthodox strategy to do this but she loves doing it. In this, there is a helper, or rather two helpers, "Mrs. Chase" and "Baby Chase."

"Mrs. Chase," so christened by the firm that made her, is a jointed life-size "mother" dummy, complete with birth canal and anus. She is placed in a properly made bed, surrounded by an adequately equipped midwife table, waste jar, a stack of folded newspaper sheets, a bench which represents the household range, covered containers of boiled water and sterilized equipment.

With the county health nurse to enact the role of "grandmother" or assistant, Nurse Hale goes into the whole procedure of birth, acting out every step. She cares for "Baby Chase" by carefully puncturing an ampule of silver nitrate and placing two drops in each eye, wiping away the excess with sterile cotton balls. She goes on to tie off and cut the cord, which in "Baby Chase" is a rubber tube. She is an actress of the finest quality, artfully dressing the part and leaving nothing to the imagination. She wears the regulation midwife attire—cotton dress, butcher apron and cap for the "make ready" of the mother; over-all "butterfly" apron and mask for the actual



Nurse Hale demonstrates the essentials for a sanitary setup during deliveries.

delivery. She enumerates the sterile items that go into the midwife's bag. She tells the women to wrap up these items in brown paper, put them in the stove with a large potato and when the potato is done the contents of the packages will be sterile and will remain that way until opened.

Nurse Hale keeps up a line of talk while "Mrs. Chase" gets an enema, a bath with real soap and water, and is made comfortable in bed. She has to back up her words with action because many of the people to whom she is talking are illiterate. With them, there can be no reliance on printed directions. The words must be written on the brain of every midwife, who can neither read nor write and etched so deeply that action will be unconscious when things are happening fast. However, printed material is available for those who wish it.

Nurse Hale is an opportunist, making use of every means that presents itself to make an impression. All meetings have a period of song and prayer, because most midwives are deeply religious. They feel their's is a calling handed down from God and many feel they have been called in a vision, the commonest one being that of an angel who came night after night to their bedsides, the while making cutting motions, thus symbolizing the cutting of the cord.

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At first, many midwives resist Nurse Hale's teaching, saying, "We receive our instructions from God direct." Nurse Hale replies, "How do you know God didn't send me?" This usually impresses them and before the class is over, both Nurse Hale and the Arkansas State Department have been accepted as instruments of the Lord, too. And who are we to say they aren't?

The final solution of the midwife problem, of course, will be her disappearance when adequate medical and hospital facilities are made available to everyone. Until that time, Nurse Hale, through classes, individual instruction, and supervision of midwives all over the state, will continue to do her magnificent job. It is not an easy one but the words that fall from her mouth, and the example of her teaching, are like objects dropped in water. They cause a ripple which spreads from one individual to another, in community after community, until the influence of Nurse Hale, consecrated, educated and inspired teacher of midwives, has reached the farthest corner of Arkansas.

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Born in Winona, W. Va., Nurse Hale attended the secondary schools in her native state, then studied in the School of Nursing, Freedmen's Hospital, Washington, D. C. Then followed a period as county health with the Works Progress Administration in Fayette county, W. Va. From August, 1935, to September, 1941, she was a public health nurse on the staff of the Public Health Nurse Association in Pittsburgh, and it was while she was with this organization that she attended a summer session in Western Reserve University, Cleveland O. Through the assistance of the Arkansas State Department of Health, she has been given also a year's course of study in public health nursing, Simmons College, Boston, from which she received a certificate in public health nursing, and six months in teachers college, Columbia University, New York. Her major subject was "Supervision in Public Health Nursing" and the bachelor of science degree was awarded to her in 1950.

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