

BOOK REVIEW

Endell Street: The Trailblazing Women who Ran World War One's Most Remarkable Military Hospital *by Wendy Moore*

Hardback, 384 pages
Atlantic Books
April 2020

This book tells the story of two remarkable suffragette doctors who helped bring about a change in social attitudes towards medical women during the First World War. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, many members of the suffragette movement volunteered for war service, but the War Office declined offers of help from qualified women doctors. Two of their number, Flora Murray and Louisa Garrett Anderson, were welcomed instead by the Red Cross in France and set up hospitals at disused hotels in Paris and near Boulogne.

Through their wide network of like-minded and well-heeled contacts, Murray and Garrett Anderson acquired funds and supplies and recruited female doctors and medical orderlies to the Women's Hospital Corp. Murray took particular charge of the hospital administration whilst Garrett Anderson performed much of the surgery. When, in 1915, the women returned to England they had acquired a reputation for competence and innovation. Sir Alfred Keogh, Director-General Army Medical Services, asked them to set up and run a military hospital in a disused workhouse in Endell Street, Covent Garden and later to establish three auxiliary convalescent hospitals in the suburbs of London.

The book brilliantly depicts the day-to-day stresses of life at the Women's Military Hospital, particularly in relation to the key battles of the war such as the disastrous Somme offensive. Casualties generally arrived at night in great numbers from the field of battle. The work involved long hours and many clinical and administrative challenges, but the hospitals gained a reputation with the patients as being "the best in London". The human touch was never forgotten; Murray and Garrett Anderson introduced recreation and therapeutic diversions into the hospital regimen. Musical and theatrical entertainments were organised and a library was provided. Over four years the hospital admitted 26,000 patients.

Promoting the status of women in health care was very important for Murray and Garrett Anderson and despite the pressure of work, they welcomed a stream of visitors, many well connected, to their hospitals. Sadly, once the urgency had subsided, the Women's Military Hospital and its annexes were closed and its medical staff returned to a professional life confined to the care of women and children. The book follows the history of female medical professionalism through to the present day when all the specialities of medicine are open to women and more than half of new medical graduates are female.

Author Wendy Moore is both a journalist and medical historian. This is a well written and meticulously researched book illustrated with photographs and paintings. It will be of interest to both historians and the general reader.

Chris Derrett
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Published online at bshm.org.uk