

The volunteers play an important role

If you have ever been a patient in Newmarket's York County Hospital, chances are you've been poked at or tested with a gadget purchased — in a manner of speaking — with candy bars and magazines.

The machine may well be a tribute to the ingenuity of medical science.

But the fact that it's available to treat the sick is a tribute to the industriousness of the 500 women and teenage girls who comprise the hospital's volunteer auxiliary — an unpaid exercise in thoughtfulness.

The exercise does, however, pay off for the hospital. Last year the auxiliary turned over \$14,000 for the purchase of special equipment. The money represented the profit for the year from the little cigaret and candy shop in the main lobby.

For a tiny operation like that, says volunteers coordinator Winnifred Leach, "it's a tremendous amount of cash."

The little shop, where the newly-organized auxiliary first went to work in 1946, together with all the other ventures the volunteers are mixed up in add up to a tremendous amount of work, too.

The shop is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and from 7 p.m. to 9. In the evenings women from the Women's Institutes, the United Church women's groups, the Catholic Women's League and other organizations take the candy and cigaret carts around to the patients.

Members of these organizations aren't members of the hospital auxiliary but they come to pitch in, anyway.

Up until March, 1964, when the hospital's east wing was opened, the shop and the carts were the only volunteer projects. But in the years since, the auxiliary has added a beauty salon, introduced an admitting escort service which guarantees that all but stretcher cases will have reassuring company from the moment they check in until they're in bed. The more seriously ill or injured arrivals are handled by para-medical personnel.

An auxiliary member is the custodian of a patient's records when the latter is being moved from one part of the hospital to another. If a patient has to be taken to a lab for tests or to x-ray, a volunteer does that as well.

Other volunteers deliver the mail or re-address it if the patient has switched rooms or gone home. They sell stamps and postcards. They read letters to patients too sick to do it themselves.

They run a pediatrics' department playroom and keep it stocked with toys and books. Three days a week they take women patients to the hairdresser and stay with them until they're finished.

And if that wasn't enough, they even make the smocks and pinafores for the women volunteers and the candy-strippers — the teenage girls whose growing ranks already total 150.

These teenagers distribute trays at mealtimes, run errands, fetch newspapers from the lobby newsstand, deliver messages and distribute flowers.

The candy-strippers — they get their name from the pattern of their pinafores — work only one shift, from 4 to 6 p.m.

"Quite a number of them go on to become nurses or nursing assistants," says Winnifred Leach.

"We have even introduced a capping ceremony for them. When a candy-striper has completed a year of volunteer work she gets a certificate and after the second year, a cap. She is given a pin by the auxiliary after the third year."

Hospital volunteers have a profound impact on patients.

"Many women who have been patients come back at some later time wanting to join the auxiliary," says Mrs. Leach. "We get wives coming in and saying, 'my husband was a patient in here and he wants to know why I don't get in there and do my bit.'"

One of the more recently inaugurated programs is a series of Tuesday morning tours of the hospital for younger school children.

"We get them as young as nursery school so that when they have to come to the hospital to have their tonsils removed or a broken leg set, they aren't terrified," Mrs. Leach says. "The exercise is both educational and reassuring and it must work because when they eventually do show up, they act as if they own the place."

For the volunteer auxiliary, talk of the future is talk of more programs, broader services.

At present, the Newmarket Business and Professional Women's Club is embarked on organizing a circulating library of books and magazines for the patients.

At the same time, Winnifred Leach would like to attract more younger women to the cause of working from two to 3½ hours a day for the principle of service.

And while there are no high school boys in the among the 15-to-18-year-old candy-strippers, other hospitals have them and she'd like to see some volunteer to work at York County.

Mrs. Leach, a widow for the past 16

years, moved to Newmarket four years ago from Toronto where she ran a flower shop on Yonge St. at Fairlawn Ave. for 10 years. She still teaches flower arranging occasionally to adult evening classes.

Son Richard, 30, is a musician and teacher at Willowdale's R.J. Lang junior high school. Daughter Nancy, 25, is also a musician who teaches at Don Mills Collegiate. Her oldest son, John, 35, is a painter who teaches at the Sheridan College School of Design.

Winnifred Leach describes being coordinator of volunteers as "a very absorbing sort of job" which she applied for and got last January after her predecessor, Mrs. Jennie Arundel, was forced by ill health to give up her responsibilities.

Mrs. Leach belongs to the Newmarket Reading Club and sings in the Trinity United Church choir "which I will probably go on doing until I get sick of hearing myself singing."

