

Woodberry Down Health Centre.

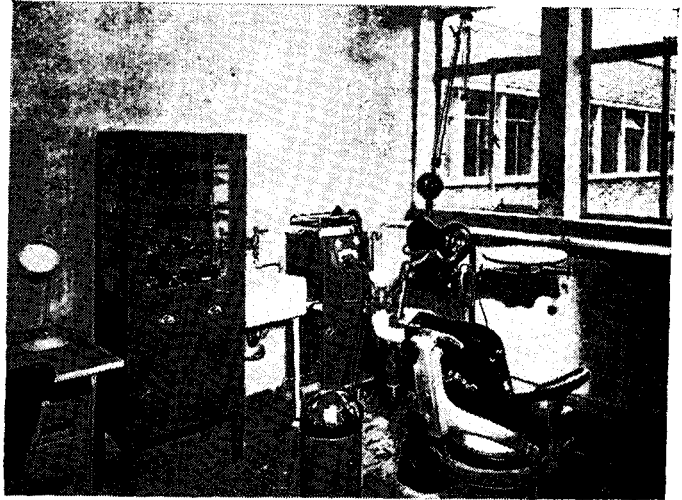
HEALTH CENTRES HAVE BEEN called by a former Minister of Health (Mr. Bevan) "a key feature in the general reconstruction of the country's health services," Mr. I. J. Hayward, the Leader of the London County Council, tells us, and when it became known that under the National Health Service Act, 1946, that the London County Council would be responsible for providing them in the County of London, the Council decided that it would commence building them as soon as possible. Accordingly the Council decided in May, 1948, that the first health centre in London should be built on the Woodberry Down Estate, and the detailed and complex task of planning the centre started.

Although there had been much discussion for some 25 years by both official bodies and other workers in the health field on the need and function of health centres, there were no precedents to follow when it came to translating an idea into bricks and mortar, furniture, fittings and equipment. It was necessary, therefore, to formulate clearly the objectives and advantages which would be obtained from the health centre before the planning of it commenced. It would be as well briefly to outline the considerations which the Council had in mind in providing this health centre.

Firstly, the Council took the view that as many as possible of the health services required by a neighbourhood should be housed in one building. The National Health Service Act made this possible for the first time and the Council is of opinion that, in London, health centres should be as "comprehensive" as possible. Hence Woodberry Down Health Centre is known as a "comprehensive health centre."

The National Health Service Act, transferred to the Council the maternity and child welfare services which had been provided for many years by the Metropolitan Borough Councils, and as the County Council as the Education Authority had been providing school health clinics for many years, it became possible to combine and integrate these two clinic services.

The opinion is widely held that the local health authority services, whose primary object is the prevention of ill-health, should be more closely linked with the general practitioner—the family doctor—so that he could play a greater part in the preventive health services. The building of a health centre with special accommodation for general practitioners will



The well-equipped Dental Surgery.

go a long way towards bringing about this closer association, since the health centre is a meeting place for all those working in the health services of the neighbourhood where general practitioners, dentists, public health doctors, health visitors and midwives carry out their day-to-day work for the people of the neighbourhood.

Secondly, it is anticipated that the health centre will provide a better and more efficient health service to the people in its neighbourhood. It will be easier and quicker for them to obtain in one building the health services they usually require, and will regard it as the health headquarters of that neighbourhood, where he or she can receive medical attendance in good surroundings, make appointments by telephone for surgery or domiciliary visits, and have available additional diagnostic facilities and auxiliary services and treatment in emergencies. All these will be very real advantages.

Finally, the health centre can provide many advantages to the doctor. Practising as a member of a group it should be possible to keep his working hours to a reasonable number and to ensure that when he is off duty he is undisturbed, that he has regular holidays and alternative arrangements can readily be made if he is sick. His clerical duties will be lessened, and group practice should offer greater opportunities than does private practice for real professional co-operation, while better facilities for good clinical work will be available and specialist services probably easier to secure.

Woodberry Down Health Centre will permit all these advantages to be enjoyed by both the health workers and the people of the neighbourhood.

The Woodberry Down Health Centre is thus the first one only, so far, and it will be studied to gain experience in administration and to evolve the best type of buildings for the future. Ideally (as at Woodberry Down) all the services will be provided in one building, but when there are existing satisfactory premises which cannot be extended, the centre may comprise a group of buildings closely situated.



A General View of the Health Centre.

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