

The National Health Service in 1954.

A REDUCTION OF about 50,000 (approximately 10 per cent.) in the size of the waiting list for hospitals in England and Wales is recorded in the Report* of the Ministry of Health for 1954, published recently.

This, the most substantial reduction for any one year since the National Health Service began, is welcome, says Mr. Iain Macleod, Minister of Health, "not only for the saving of distress and anxiety to the patients concerned, but also because it reflects the increased efficiency achieved in the management of hospital beds. Especially encouraging is the reduction by 43 per cent. in the number of patients awaiting admission to tuberculosis units and sanatoria, whose number fell from 5,299 to 3,017 during the year."

Finance.

The total cost of the National Health Service (England and Wales) in the year ended 31st March, 1954, was about £473,000,000. Of this nearly £368,000,000 was met by the Exchequer.

Hospital Service.

The reduction during 1954 in the size of hospital waiting lists was 49,277—51,564 if the mental and mental deficiency hospitals are included. At the end of the year the total waiting list was 474,000. The reduction, of course, varied throughout the country. The largest percentage reduction was among those waiting for tuberculosis treatment—43 per cent.

The number of in-patients and out-patients continues to increase, and the reduction in the waiting lists reflects the increased ability of the Hospital Service to meet the demand made upon it. The fact that 87,000 more in-patients were treated in 1954 than in 1953 was realised partly because of an increase of 5,487 in the beds available. A great deal, however, must be attributed to an improved use of the beds and other resources available. Three in every ten beds in non-mental hospitals took one extra patient each during the year. This small but significant increase meant that upwards of 70,000 additional patients were treated.

Out-Patients.

Nearly 60,000 more patients attended out-patient departments in 1954, although the number of actual attendances did not rise in proportion. There were actually fewer attendances at casualty departments, although there were 20,000 more patients.

Mental Health Services.

During the year "there were encouraging signs of the effect of the special measures instituted to meet" the shortage of beds and nursing staff.

At the end of 1954 there was bed-space for 121,555 patients in mental hospitals, and 140,487 patients in residence, which showed overcrowding of 15.6 per cent.

There were 987 more mental deficiency beds at the end of 1954. With 52,240 patients, however, accommodation was overcrowded by 12 per cent.

At the end of 1954, the average number of staffed beds per nurse was 6.6 in mental hospitals and 7.0 in mental deficiency hospitals. Lack of staff accounted for 765 beds in mental hospitals and 1,336 in mental deficiency hospitals being out of use, compared with 1,099 and 1,750 at the end of 1953.

"The position of the elderly in mental hospitals calls for special comment," states the Report. About 43,000, or 29 per cent., of the patients in mental hospitals are aged 65 and over. Indications are that many of these are suffering from mental conditions which soon clear up, leaving residual medical and social disabilities which do not call for nursing care and attention.

Big Drop in Tb. Waiting Lists.

"Perhaps the most significant trend to note during 1954 was

the further accentuation of the downward curve of tuberculosis notifications in spite of better diagnostic facilities." The number fell from 46,546 in 1953 to 42,348 last year. In the same time the number of deaths from tuberculosis dropped from 8,902 to 7,897. In 1948 deaths numbered 21,993.

Blood Transfusion.

While the number of people on the panel of blood donors (540,389) was the highest since the war, it is estimated that a further increase of 25 per cent. is needed to meet the probable growth of demand. The number of donations rose from 659,674 in 1953 to 700,202 in 1954. This is 30,000 greater than the peak war-time figure.

Clinical Research.

During the financial year 1953-54 the total estimated expenditure on clinical research by National Health Service hospital authorities was approximately £500,000, of which about one-third was met from Exchequer funds. These figures do not include the cost of research carried out by Universities of the Medical Research Council in National Health Service hospitals and clinics. Research is in progress over a wide field, including cancer, rheumatism and mental illness.

Hospital Staffing.

Special economy in manpower resulted in the fact that the expected increase in the total hospital staff in 1954 was less than 2 per cent., compared with about 5 per cent. in 1952, despite a developing service.

The number of female student nurses in training increased during the year by 196, but the number of males fell by 314, and there was therefore a net reduction in the total number of student nurses from 48,292 to 48,174. There was only a slight increase in the numbers of whole-time trained male nurses from 12,038 to 12,052. The numbers of whole-time trained female nurses on the other hand, increased substantially from 37,584 to 38,382, while the numbers of part-time trained nurses also increased, from 9,320 to 10,058. The total nursing staff of all grades showed a small decrease of 58 whole-time and an increase of 1,500 part-time.

"The staffing of mental and mental deficiency hospitals continued to cause anxiety especially as the number of student nurses again showed a reduction during the year (males by 122; females by 68)."

Commenting on the figures of doctors and patients for 1953, the Cohen Committee on General Practice observed that the time might be drawing near when it would be difficult adequately to absorb new entrants to general practice at the present rate. "The figures for the current year emphasise this point."

General Dental Services.

The total of courses of dental treatment for which payment was claimed in 1954 was 7,441,903 which was close on 800,000 more than in 1953. In addition there were 1,895,365 claims for payment for emergency treatment (1,704,127 in 1953). The amount of fees authorised by the Dental Estimates Board and paid to dentists was £28,977,330. This included £6,816,935 paid by patients for dentures and treatment.

The amount of conservative treatment provided again increased, most markedly in respect of persons under 21. Altogether, over a quarter of all courses of treatment were for children.

Supplementary Eye Services.

The volume of applications for both sight-tests and glasses continued to increase in 1954, and the number of tests given was about 5½ per cent. higher than in the previous year. Altogether 4,441,000 sight-tests were given and 3,995,000 pairs of glasses supplied.

Pharmaceutical Services.

During the year 218,712,815 prescriptions were dispensed by chemists, which was a decrease of nearly 1,000,000 in 1953. The total cost of these prescriptions was £45,969,620,

* Report of the Ministry of Health for the year ended 31st December, 1954, Part 1. Command 9566 H.M.S.O. price 8s.

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