

NATIONAL INSURANCE AND NURSING BENEFIT.

A most important National Conference on the Nursing of Insured Persons, convened by the Association of Approved Societies, was held at the Caxton Hall, Westminster, on November 26th, Mr. Charles Bathurst, M.P., presiding. In opening the meeting the Chairman said that all Approved Societies were concerned to keep down sickness benefit. Several points affected this question, notably the housing problem, and the question of malingering. He did not think that there was a great deal of malingering, though undoubtedly there was some. The present Conference between delegates nominated by insurance committees, by approved societies, and by nursing associations had been arranged because there was a general and growing feeling that it would be of advantage both to Approved Societies and to their members if Medical Benefit were to be supplemented by Nursing Benefit.

Somewhat limited powers were given to Approved Societies under Section 21 of the National Insurance Act to give subscriptions or donations for the support of district nurses, and to appoint nurses for the purpose. Many persons would have liked a larger sum to be devoted to nursing benefit, but the Government had not time or inclination to listen to suggestions on that score. Last September a sub-committee of the Association of Approved Societies, which had been considering the question, presented a report to the effect that any scheme which might be adopted should be of uniform and general application, and not piecemeal or local in character. That was just what was not provided for in the Insurance Act. The sub-committee further were of opinion that in order to secure uniformity Nursing Benefit should be managed by the Insurance Committees. The question had also been considered by the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute, which favoured close association between Approved Societies and existing nursing associations, and a capitation fee of 3d. per head, per patient, or 6d. a visit. A circular embodying these proposals had been sent to Approved Societies, but no definite steps had been taken, except that such a scheme had been tried locally in Kent. There was, however, a difficulty about the form of report asked for by the Approved Societies and the scheme was in suspension.

There was also the difficulty of dealing with the rural areas of the Country. The Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute advocated the employment of thoroughly trained nurses in the urban districts, but did not consider this feasible in rural districts. On the other hand there were suggestions as to even-handed justice, and that whatever was decided all should have the same care. If they were going to require fully trained nurses to deal with all cases, injustice might be done to County Nursing Associations, which had

been doing good work on very narrow means; further, a sufficient number of fully-trained nurses were not available at the present time to supply the need.

They should do all in their power in connection with an amending Bill, which would be before the country at an early date, that provision should be made for an adequate Nursing Service for all insured persons. When dealing with so many Approved Societies and Associations, it was difficult to secure concerted action without intervention, and he thought Government intervention would be necessary for this reason, and also to help to oil the machinery. A moiety of the money for Nursing Benefit should be supplied by the Approved Societies, and some portion from the Exchequer. The scheme for Nursing Benefit should be applicable to the whole country, and he thought the view of the Sub-Committee was right that the Government should be asked to help to carry it out.

MISS AMY HUGHES (General Superintendent, Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute) gave a brief account of the history and organization of the work of the Institute, the funds at its disposal, and its system of training and inspection. All Queen's nurses had a clear salary of not less than £30; or £33 if they took midwifery cases. She claimed that the County Nursing Associations did excellent work through their "Village Nurses" who worked under supervision (as there was a regular system of inspection) and received salaries of from 18s. to 22s. a week. She thought it would be more economical to employ existing nurses than to create a State Service. Both Queen's and Village Nurses were specially prepared, not only to nurse the sick, but to be a centre of education among the people, and so to raise the standard of life in the home.

MISS K. STEPHENSON (Wiltshire Nursing Association) said that the Association was maintained by provident subscriptions from the labouring classes, midwifery fees, jumble sales, voluntary subscriptions and certain sums for attending poor law cases; the continued existence of many associations was very precarious. She described the system maintained in connection with her association, and thought that not only fully trained nurses should be employed as Insurance nurses, but that a lower standard should be recognized.

DR. H. H. MILLS (Member of the London Insurance Committee) said that few Insurance Committees so far realized their powers. Discussing a universal Nursing Service he considered that such a Service would favourably affect the sickness funds of Approved Societies, as a skilled attention to wounds, to varicose ulcers and other ailments often meant the difference between a short and a long period of incapacity, as did also educational nurses going about and teaching common sense laws. Nurses should be properly trained, certificated, and registered, and the members of a State Service should be efficient and educated.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)