

The Midwife.

BOARD OF EDUCATION.

DRAFT REGULATIONS FOR THE TRAINING OF MIDWIVES.

PREFATORY MEMORANDUM.

The Board of Education in a White Paper (Cmd 353) containing Draft Regulations for the Training of Midwives, with a Prefatory Memorandum, presented to Parliament by command of His Majesty, state in part that (1) No scheme for promoting the health of the population is complete which fails to provide for the care of maternity. The Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918, conferred upon Local Authorities increased powers for the care of expectant and nursing mothers. The Local Government Board have provided substantial grants in aid of such services as the inspection of midwives, ante-natal care, and an adequate service of midwives, and the Ministry of Health are continuing those grants with the probability of some raising of the conditions as to the services to be provided. In all these schemes the midwife has a vital part to play. For success they are alike dependent upon the existence of a sufficient supply of midwives competent to undertake the responsible duties of their office. It has been estimated that perhaps three-quarters of the births in England and Wales are attended by midwives. The Board have accordingly decided, in consultation with the Ministry of Health, to give grants in aid of the training of midwives. The grants are intended partly to extend the training of suitable women by facilitating the reduction of the fees charged to the students in training, and partly to improve the character of the training given. (2) The Board of Education points out that the supply of practising midwives is inadequate, at any rate in many rural districts; that the life, though an honourable one, is arduous, and the earning small and precarious. If an efficient midwifery service is to be secured, it is essential that the status of the midwife should be raised and that competent women, who devote themselves to this service should be adequately remunerated and enabled to secure satisfactory conditions of service in other respects also. But, whatever may be accomplished in this direction, the cost of training may still present a serious difficulty. This difficulty has been accentuated by the necessary action of the Central Midwives Board in raising the minimum period of training from three to six months, and also by the increased cost of living.

(3) Under modern conditions a midwife should be competent not only to attend confinements but to advise her clients in regard to ante-natal conditions (other than those requiring medical attention) and the care of the newly-born child.

It follows that in accordance with the requirements of the Central Midwives Board the curriculum should provide not only for the training of the student to follow the profession of the midwife in its narrow interpretation, but also for giving her a satisfactory knowledge of such subjects as the hygiene of pregnancy, the care and management of the infant, the best methods of encouraging breast feeding, hand feeding of infants, and some practical acquaintance with elementary hygiene, personal, domestic and general. The student should also be made familiar with the work of Maternity Centres, Infant Welfare Centres, and other similar institutions.

The Board appreciate the value of the practice commonly adopted of providing facilities also for training in district nursing, though they cannot recognise such training for the purposes of the present grants.

(4) Though the holding of any sort of entrance examination may not be practicable, steps should be taken to secure that the students admitted are likely, from their character and previous education, to profit by the training and instruction given.

The Board point out that even the lengthened course of training now required under the Regulations of the Central Midwives Board affords all too brief a period in which to gain under supervision the requisite practical skill and experience. The Regulations accordingly provide for special grants in aid of approved arrangements for extending the normal course by not less than a month in order to enable the midwife to gain extended practical experience, and to develop her judgment and sense of responsibility.

(6) The grants in aid of these courses are intended to be primarily for the benefit of students who desire to practise as midwives. Subject to two exceptions no student will be taken into account for grant unless she has signed an agreement or declaration of *bona fide* intention to practise as a midwife. It is not necessary that she should devote her whole time midwifery. If she is practising in a rural area it may be impossible for her to do so, but though she may undertake district nursing or similar work in addition to midwifery, she will be expected to continue in the actual practice of midwifery. Where a student is in receipt of a scholarship from a Local Authority or from a Voluntary Association, she generally signs an agreement as to future service in a particular area, and this agreement should normally satisfy the requirements of the Regulations. The agreement signed by a Queen's Nurse will be accepted for this purpose even though it only requires the practice of midwifery for one year.

(8) If existing midwives are to be equal to the increasing duties and higher standards of work which are now being expected of them, it is very

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