

PROPOSED SCHEME OF PENSIONS FOR HOSPITAL OFFICERS AND NURSES.

We have received the following communication from the Hon. Secretaries of King Edward's Hospital Fund for London:—

1. The draft scheme of Pensions for Hospital Officers and Nurses, details of which were circulated to the General Council in December last, has now reached a stage at which the Management Committee desire to elicit an expression of opinion from the Council.

Origin of the Scheme.

2. The question of a general scheme of pensions has been under discussion for at least twenty years. In 1914 the King's Fund, at the request of the Hospital Officers' Association and with the concurrence of the hospitals, appointed a Committee of Enquiry under the Chairmanship of Mr. W. J. H. Whittall, F.I.A. The Report of this Committee was presented in 1919 and published by the King's Fund for the consideration of the parties concerned. By the end of 1924 first the College of Nursing and then the Hospital Officers' Association had prepared schemes on the lines suggested in the Report, and had (after correspondence with the King's Fund) submitted them to the British Hospitals' Association. The result was that all three parties concurred in asking the King's Fund to convene a Conference to discuss the question.

3. The Conference, which was presided over by the late Lord Stuart of Wortley, expressed sympathy with the principle of a pension scheme for the administrative and nursing staffs, prepared a memorandum in which the two schemes, with a few modifications, were combined, to form one draft scheme, and, without itself pronouncing any judgment, circulated the memorandum to the hospitals of the whole country for their consideration and for expressions of opinion and suggestions.

Reasons for the Scheme.

4. The scheme is designed to remove various difficulties which arise from the absence of any general system, e.g., the inadequacy and uncertainty of the present provision for old age, the derangement in the finances which at most hospitals follows the grant of a pension, and the resulting tendency to postpone unduly the age of retirement; the loss of all pension rights on migration to another hospital, with the consequent restriction on the choice of officers and on the openings for promotion; and the effect which the absence of pension prospects has in deterring suitable entrants to hospital service, especially in the case of nurses, whose working life is comparatively short. These difficulties not only cause hardship to individuals but militate against the full efficiency of the voluntary hospitals.

Its Principal Features.

5. The scheme as drafted includes the salaried staff of the hospitals, administrative, clerical and dispensing, all female professional nurses whether in hospitals or in other branches of nursing service, and probationer nurses after their first year of training. In its general outlines it follows the Federated Superannuation System for Universities. Complete provision would be made in advance by contributions from employers and employees; policies would be taken out with insurance companies to secure superannuation benefits in various alternative forms; and the policies would follow the officer or nurse on migration or, within certain limits, on leaving the service altogether.

The Present Position.

6. The Draft Scheme Memorandum was sent to 140 hospitals in London, containing 13,000 beds. Replies

have been received from 93, containing 11,300 beds. Of these, 52 hospitals, containing 8,263 beds, expressed general approval with or without reservations on points of details, and usually subject to the scheme proving financially practicable. Another 9 hospitals were giving it sympathetic consideration; 4 expressed sympathy with a scheme; 9 raised points of detail without expressing any general view; and 4 reserved their opinion. Only 15, containing 581 beds, sent definitely negative replies.

7. Several of the hospitals asked the King's Fund to convene a conference of hospitals in London that were in sympathy with the Scheme to discuss details. This the Management Committee have agreed to do and the conference will be held on May 19th.

8. The principal questions that will come before this conference will be whether, or on what conditions probationer nurses after their first year should be included in the scheme; the closely-allied question how long a probationer or nurse should remain in the profession in order to obtain the benefit of the hospital contributions; and the question to what extent and in what way the King's Fund could offer financial assistance.

9. On the question of probationer nurses, it is pointed out, on the one hand, that their inclusion adds to the expenditure of the hospitals, and that this would be largely for the benefit of probationers who will not remain in hospital service, and many of whom may not remain in nursing service at all, or may not be able to secure the maintenance of their policies while in private nursing. On the other hand, it is urged that some provision for a pension is necessary if suitable candidates are not to be deterred by their friends and advisers from entering the nursing profession; that, if they do not begin while in training, the difficulty of making provision later on is greatly increased; that much of the nursing work of the hospitals is done by probationers; and that the hospital contribution for those who do not remain in the profession for the specified number of years will come back to the hospital.

Attitude of the King's Fund.

10. The Management Committee consider that, for the reasons given above, the establishment of a general scheme of pensions of the kind proposed is in the best interests of the hospitals as well as of the officers and nurses. They welcome the initiative taken, on the lines suggested by the report of the King's Fund Committee of Enquiry, by the College of Nursing and by the Hospital Officers' Association, and the response to that initiative by the British Hospitals' Association and the individual hospitals. They consider that the King's Fund would be promoting the efficiency of the hospital service by offering financial assistance so far as it reasonably can.

11. The Management Committee accordingly RECOMMEND

(a) that, in making annual grants to maintenance to hospitals on its list at the ordinary distribution, the King's Fund should take into account (subject to such conditions as may be approved by the Management Committee) the amount spent by a hospital on an approved contributory pensions scheme, including amounts spent in respect of existing officers and retired officers;

(b) that it be referred to the Management Committee to consider the question by what method the funds required to carry out the above recommendation could be provided without affecting the grants that would otherwise have been made, and to take action thereon;

(c) that it be referred to the distribution Committee to consider the question by what method and on what basis the above expenditure should be specially taken into account without affecting the grants that would otherwise have been made; and after consulting the Management Committee, to take action thereon in pre-

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