

# The Midwife.

## MATERNAL MORTALITY.

The Minister of Health, in a communication addressed to the Maternal and Child Welfare Scheme Authorities (England) (Circular 888), informs them that he has been giving further attention to the subject of maternal mortality, the continued high level of which causes him much concern, and which he describes as "one of the saddest features of our social life."

In Circular 517, issued in June, 1924, the Minister expressed the opinion that *inter alia* it was desirable that there should be an investigation in every area by a competent and experienced Medical Officer of all maternal deaths, and of all cases of puerperal fever, with a view to ascertaining more exactly the actual causes which lead to maternal mortality, in order to provide further means of prevention.

His object is, with the help of the Local Authorities and of general practitioners throughout the country, to obtain a mass of information hitherto not available as to the causes of death in a large number of cases of maternal mortality. In order that such information may be properly classified and compared, and the results put in a form which will be of service to Medical Officers of Health and the medical profession generally, it is necessary that investigations should be directed to certain definite points, and that when completed they should be considered by some competent body which will issue a report upon any facts and conclusions derived from their study.

It is the Minister's intention to set up at the Ministry a representative Maternal Mortality Committee somewhat on the lines of the Cancer Committee, whose duty, among other matters, will be to consider this investigation. In view of the desirability of securing uniformity in the methods of obtaining information he proposes to invite this Committee to draw up a Questionnaire which should serve as a guide in making the investigations. The Minister hopes that it will be found possible to commence the Inquiry at an early date and to send in to the Ministry of Health a report at the end of each quarter showing the results of the enquiries made during the preceding three months. It will be the business of the Maternal Mortality Committee to collate and classify the information received from this and other sources, to formulate any conclusions which may arise therefrom, to indicate the lines on which further research is desirable, and generally to advise what future action can be taken to bring about a progressive reduction of maternal mortality.

## CENTRAL MIDWIVES' BOARD.

At the meeting of the Central Midwives' Board held on April 4th a letter was read from the Secretary of the Ministry of Health stating that the Minister, having had under consideration the suggestions made by Dame Janet Campbell in her Report on "The Protection of Motherhood" for the improvement of the midwifery service in this country, has come to the conclusion that it would be expedient to appoint a Departmental Committee to enquire generally into the training of midwives and the conditions under which they are practising, and that he would be glad to be informed that the Board agrees that such an inquiry is desirable, further stating that the Minister would propose to nominate two representatives of the Board on such a Committee.

That the Minister of Health be informed that the Board is in agreement with him as to the desirability of an inquiry

into the training of midwives and the conditions under which they are practising, and that two members of the Board will be willing to serve upon any Committee which he may appoint in connection with such an inquiry.

The Board, while agreeing with the Minister's desire to appoint such a Departmental Committee, hopes that he will at the same time bear in mind the importance of mobilising all the best available forces in investigating the problem of maternal mortality which is of vital importance to the health of the country and, indeed, of the world.

A letter was read from Miss Puxley, of the Ministry of Health, enclosing a copy of a letter from the General Medical Council with regard to the Memorandum as to the drugs which may properly be carried and administered by midwives, and requesting that the Minister may be furnished with the observations of the Board on the Resolution adopted by the Executive Committee of the Council. The Resolution in question is as follows:—

"That the Ministry of Health be informed that the Executive Committee do not think it expedient in the public interest to distribute to midwives for use in their practice such a schedule of drugs as is set out in this Memorandum, and are of opinion that Rule 19 E of the Central Midwives Board should incorporate the wording of the corresponding (19 E) Rule of the Central Midwives Board for Scotland."

[Rule 19 E of the Central Midwives Board for Scotland is as follows:—

"No midwife shall administer or apply any drug (*e.g.*, pituitrin or ergot), before the birth of the child, other than a simple aperient, unless on the instruction in each case of a registered medical practitioner, called to her assistance by using for this purpose the form of sending for medical assistance (.....) properly filled up and signed by her."

It was agreed that a reply be sent to the Minister in the terms of a letter drafted by the Chairman and approved by the Board.

## THE EAST END MATERNITY HOSPITAL.

In view of the continued average maternal death-rate (4 per 1,000) which is giving the Minister of Health so much concern, the East End Maternity Hospital, 384-398, Commercial Road, E., has cause for congratulation on its continued low maternal mortality. Out of its 2,061 patients in 1927 only one death occurred.

Miss M. Anderson, the Lady Superintendent, whose report is always inspiring writes:—

Our old-established Ante-natal work becomes more and more popular day by day as over 6,000 attendances testify how the mothers appreciate the help given at these clinics.

Miss Page, who supervises this part of our work, fully realises that we can better help a mother by fanning a flame of capacity than by censuring her faults, and although custom still leads to many faults, it justifies none. The heart of the mother is the shrine of the child and in the womb of the mother lies the future of the world, and the mothers are learning that the plea of ignorance will never take away their responsibilities. The Ante-natal work is the pride of our lives because we see mothers learning wisdom and benefiting by their instruction.

Courage, patience and perseverance are needed in this department and with these virtues difficulties apparently insurmountable are overcome.

Health is normal, is our motto. Disease is abnormal. A mother is meant to be well physically, mentally and

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