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EDITORIAL.

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT.

Memorandum by the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London.*

The Local Government Act, which incorporates provisions which will effect far-reaching changes in the Health Services of the country, received the Royal Assent on Wednesday, March 27th, the publication, therefore, is opportune of a Memorandum on the Relations between Voluntary and Municipal Hospitals under the Act, which has been prepared by a Special Committee of King Edward's Hospital Fund for London appointed by the Prince of Wales as President, of which the Right Hon. J. H. Whitley was Chairman.

The Committee had under consideration the position of the voluntary hospitals in the hospital service of the country after the Poor Law Infirmaries have been transferred to the county authorities under the Local Government Act, and the Memorandum deals with general principles affecting the whole country and not specially with the problems peculiar to London.

The main principle laid down is that it is essential that after the transfer of the Poor Law Infirmaries to the County Authorities there should be the maximum of efficient service for the sick and suffering; for this purpose there must be co-operation not competition or overlapping, between the voluntary hospitals and the municipal hospitals.

That in order to secure these ends there should be provision for continuous consultation between those responsible for the two kinds of hospitals, with due safeguards for the maintenance of the independence of the voluntary hospitals. That this would be facilitated if the appropriate committees of the County Councils and County Borough Councils had amongst their members some persons experienced in the work of the voluntary hospitals.

The Special Committee hold that co-operation is necessary for the efficiency of the municipal hospitals as well as for the maintenance of the voluntary hospitals.

The Committee are of opinion that the voluntary element in management and finance produces an atmosphere which, in this country at all events, is particularly favourable to hospital service. It allows, even in large institutions, the freest possible scope for the personal factor in the work of doctors, nurses and administrators, on which the well-being of the patients largely depends. It affords the medical men, including the leaders of the profession whose services elsewhere command a remuneration proportionate to their long training and great skill, the maximum of freedom to use all their faculties, aided by the resources of the hospital, for the advancement of medical science. The lay management is in the hands of individuals, often

of high capacity in their ordinary spheres, who have voluntarily undertaken it because they are personally interested in it, and who are becoming more and more representative of all classes. The work of the hospital is the sole business of the governing body. All concerned are encouraged to take a personal interest in the welfare of the patients. The hospital is in direct touch with the outside world and has a peculiar sensitiveness to public opinion which is very valuable in connection with the treatment of the sick.

As a result of all these causes, the voluntary hospitals have acquired a tradition and a prestige which, when combined with the free scope which they offer to initiative, have attracted to their service men of conspicuous ability, both medical and lay. It has been in the voluntary hospitals that the highest standard of medical and surgical work has been developed, and it has been with the standard of the voluntary hospitals before them, and with the aid of medical men trained in the atmosphere and spirit of those hospitals, that the recent improvements in many of the Poor Law infirmaries have taken place. An efficient and adequate hospital service can be created, not by converting the voluntary hospitals into official institutions, but by developing municipal hospitals in co-operation with, and under the influence of, a vigorous voluntary hospital system.

Suggestions are made for securing the best form of co-operation in the future. For instance, that there should be continuous consultation between the authorities responsible for the rate-supported and the voluntary hospitals, respectively. There should be a Standing Joint Hospitals Conference in each area, composed of equal numbers of representatives of the appropriate Committee of the county or county borough council and of representatives of the voluntary hospitals, including both laymen and medical men.

One of the principal functions of the Joint Conference would be to consider the hospital needs of the area, and the question which of these needs could best be supplied by the voluntary hospitals and which by the county hospitals.

We do not note any suggestion of representation of the Nursing element on the proposed Committees, but it is very important that provision should be made for such representation. Nursing now has the status of a State Registered Profession, it is entitled to claim that its voice should be heard on these national committees in reference to its own Department, concerning which it alone is able to give expert information and advice. We commend this point to the consideration of the Council of King Edward's Hospital Fund for Nurses.

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