

The Midwife.

MIDWIVES BILL.

The Bill to amend the Midwives Acts, 1902 to 1926, presented in the House of Commons by Sir Kingsley Wood, Minister of Health, on March 18th, supported by Mr. Shakespeare, is of far-reaching importance, and should be studied by both Midwives, Registered Nurses and their organisations. It is published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, and can be purchased through any bookseller, price 4d. net.

Summary of the Bill.

The organisation of a domiciliary service of salaried midwives by the local authorities who are local supervising authorities* under the Midwives Acts was recommended in the report of the Joint Council of Midwifery issued in 1935.

The Bill provides for the establishment by the local supervising authorities of a salaried Midwives' service; the payment by those local authorities of compensation to midwives who voluntarily retire from practice and to those who are required to retire owing to old age or infirmity; the payment by the Exchequer of grants towards the cost of the new service and towards the amounts expended in compensation; the prohibition of maternity nursing by unqualified persons; and the provision of "refresher" courses of instruction for all midwives in practice.

The New Service.

Clause 1.—Each local supervising authority is required to secure the whole-time employment of a sufficient number of midwives for attendance, not only as midwives but also as maternity nurses during and for a period of at least 10 days after childbirth, on women in their own homes.

Clause 3.—Fees will be charged for the services of the midwives, but the local authorities are empowered to grant remission or rebates in proper cases. When the new service is established every expectant mother, whatever her financial position, will be able to obtain the services of a qualified midwife for her confinement, and if she engages a doctor a midwife will be available for the maternity nursing.

Duties of the Minister.

The detailed proposals of local supervising authorities are to be submitted to the Minister.

Appointment of Midwives.

Clause 2.—In order that midwives at present practising may have every opportunity of applying for posts in the new service, every authority is required before first making appointments under the Act to advertise its intention in the Press and to send a separate notification to each midwife practising in its area.

Every authority which has a superannuation scheme is empowered, when assessing the amount of pension payable to a midwife first appointed under the new scheme within three years from the commencement of the new Act, to take into account any period or periods not exceeding 10 years during which she practised as a midwife before employment by the authority.

Exchequer Assistance.

Clause 4.—Provision is made for the payment of

* County Councils, County Borough Councils and the Councils of 33 non-County Boroughs and Urban Districts.

Exchequer assistance equivalent in the aggregate to 50 per cent. of the additional expenditure imposed on local authorities.

Compensation.

Clause 5.—To avoid hardship to those midwives who do not secure salaried posts and who may find it difficult to continue to practise in competition with the new service, the Bill provides that all practising midwives who surrender their certificates to the appropriate local authority within a period of three years from the commencement of the new Act, shall be entitled to the payment of compensation from the authority. The authority may within the same period require any midwife who is incapable by reason of age or infirmity, of efficiently performing her duties to surrender her certificate, which will be returned to her after cancellation. In such cases compensation must be paid by the authority.

Prohibition of Practice by Unqualified Persons.

Clause 6.—When the Minister is satisfied that an authority has established an adequate service of salaried midwives, he will be empowered to make an Order applying to that authority's area (or in the case of a County Council to any district in the county), the effect of which will be to make it an offence for any person who is neither a midwife nor a registered nurse to receive any remuneration for attending as a nurse on a woman in childbirth or at any time during the 10 days immediately after childbirth.

Exceptions are made for (i) persons undergoing training with a view to becoming doctors or midwives, and (ii) women who, before the 1st January, 1937, have been certified by the authorities of an institution approved by the Minister to have been trained in obstetric nursing.

Post-Certificate Instruction.

Clause 7.—The Central Midwives Board are empowered to frame rules requiring midwives in practice to attend post-certificate courses, and local authorities are required to provide or arrange for the necessary courses. The rules will be subject to approval by the Minister.

Miscellaneous.

In the Bill "Domiciliary midwife" means a midwife who is available for attendance on women in their own homes as a midwife or maternity nurse.

Clauses 8-11.—The opportunity has been taken to include certain amendments of the Midwives Acts.

CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

At the February Examination conducted under the authority of the Central Midwives Board, 1,003 candidates were examined, 728 passed, the percentage of failures being 27.4.

THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AND MATERNITY SERVICE.

The British Medical Association in its issue of March 28th has an interesting article under the above heading, in the course of which it declares:

"Maternal mortality is a scientific and administrative problem which deserves careful and scientific study, but, in the experience of practising doctors, the publicity which it is receiving to-day is tending to terrify child-bearing women and is in itself a cause of increased mortality."

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