

The Midwife.

SAVING THE LIVES OF MOTHERS.

ACTION OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH ON THE REPORT ON AN INVESTIGATION INTO MATERNAL MORTALITY.

Further measures to save maternal lives are announced by the Minister of Health, Sir Kingsley Wood, in connection with the special Report on Maternal Mortality in England,* which was published on Wednesday, April 28th.

The Report, and the Minister's action, follow close examination by specially qualified experts of the circumstances of areas where the maternal death-rate has been exceptionally high, compared with others where it is below the average. The investigators find that there are many factors in this problem which cannot be dissociated and separately assessed.

Team Work : Midwives, Specialists, and Flying Squads.

Local authorities, says the Report, should secure proper team work between health visitors, midwives and doctors—whether in general practice, attached to hospitals or clinics, or specialists—and Sir Kingsley Wood is making suggestions to them for this purpose.

Under the Act passed last year every mother should be able after July 1st next to have a properly qualified midwife for her confinement.

Every doctor who does midwifery cases under a local authority's scheme should be interested, experienced and actively engaged in such work, have enough time for unhurried work, and be ready to co-operate with the local authority's own officers and others concerned.

Every local scheme ought to provide specialist consultants, and their services should be fully used. Lives should not be risked by taking cases to hospital when they are too ill to be moved, and Sir Kingsley Wood is urging local authorities to arrange for flying squads of skilled hospital staffs to be brought to the patient in such cases.

Abortion.

A number of deaths are due to attempted abortion, which is increasing. Mr. Norman Birkett, K.C., is to be Chairman of a committee to be set up at once to see what can be done to reduce mortality from this cause.

Diet and Nutrition.

Sir Kingsley Wood has recently called upon all maternity and child welfare authorities to overhaul their present arrangements so as to secure enough milk or other suitable food for women throughout pregnancy. The Report suggests further research into the possible influence of diet on child-bearing and the Minister is in touch with the Medical Research Council on the subject.

Self Help : Education for Mothers.

The mother herself should take full advantage of the facilities everywhere available for ante-natal and post-natal care. Local authorities should encourage this, by arranging talks and lectures, besides personal advice from doctors, midwives and health visitors.

Housing and Overcrowding.

With regard to housing and overcrowding, the Report states that the available evidence on the effects of bad housing and overcrowding on puerperal mortality shows

that districts in which there are areas with bad housing and overcrowding are just as likely to have low rates of puerperal mortality as those in which housing is good and overcrowding is less.

WELSH BOARD OF HEALTH.

Report on Maternal Mortality in Wales.

The causes of high maternal mortality in Wales have been the subject of close investigations by Medical Officers of the Welsh Board of Health, and a Report† of the investigations, with recommendations, has been presented by the Minister of Health to Parliament.

Sir Kingsley Wood on Wednesday, April 28th, also made a statement on the action which it is proposed to take in regard to recommendations contained in the Report.

In several ways Wales presents an interesting field for comparative social study. Industrially, in economic circumstances and in the geographical distribution of population, two extremes in type of area exist. In the South Wales coalfield highly industrialised conditions predominate, and the large seaport towns are also commercial centres, engaged in considerable foreign trade. Most of the rest of Wales is rural in character and sparsely populated, and conditions have not greatly changed in the last generation.

Industrial and Rural Areas.

The Report states that, while in rural Wales the women marry at later ages, the number of births per married woman is higher in rural than in industrial areas at all child-bearing ages. The illegitimate birth-rate is roughly twice as high in the rural as in the industrial parts.

Procured abortion, it is stated, is believed to be common in South Wales and to have increased in recent years, but is infrequent in the rural districts. The mortality rate from puerperal sepsis, also, is lower in rural Wales. Otherwise no important variations are exhibited in the maternal death-rates for the different classes of district.

The Problem in Perspective.

While, relative to England, the maternal mortality rate is high in Wales, the Report points out that the number of deaths each year due to childbearing is small in comparison with the number of deaths of a more or less preventable nature from other groups of causes.

Measures to reduce Maternal Mortality.

In measures to reduce the loss of life from childbirth, much of which could be prevented if proper measures were taken, all parties concerned, the mother, the doctor, the nurse, the local authorities and the State, it is stated, have their respective functions. First, there must be a recognition of the importance of sound general health. Childbirth is normally a safe and natural event, and women should be encouraged to look upon child-bearing in that light.

Maternity Services of Local Authorities.

Recommendations are made for improving the standard of the maternity services. At present the services provided by most of the local authorities are inadequate, and it is stated that outside industrial South Wales and Flintshire very little maternity work is undertaken either during the ante-natal period or at the confinement.

The Report recommends that every local authority should organise and provide an efficient maternity service which should be available to every mother.

Before the adjournment of the House of Lords for the Whitsun Recess, the Maternity Services (Scotland) Act received the Royal Assent.

* Published by the Stationery Office, price 5s. 6d.

† Cmd. 5423. Obtainable from H.M. Stationery Office, 1, St. Andrew's Crescent, Cardiff, price 2s. 6d.

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