

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

THE MEDICAL PROFESSION AND THE CANCER BILL.

The Minister of Health, Mr. Walter Elliot, on February 21st, received a deputation from the British Medical Association, who wished to discuss with him a number of questions which will arise if the Cancer Bill becomes law in connection with the guidance which the Minister will give to the responsible local authorities.

Sir Kaye Le Fleming, the Chairman of the Council of the British Medical Association, introduced the deputation, which included Professor Picken (Chairman of the Public Health Committee), Sir Henry Brackenbury, Mr. Bishop Harman, Dr. J. W. Bone, and Dr. Hill (Deputy Secretary of the Association).

The deputation especially expressed the hope that the cancer schemes would make use of the facilities of the larger voluntary and municipal general hospitals, which normally provide the specialist services in each region, and would not establish separate special clinics not closely linked with the general hospitals. They also suggested that the arrangements for facilitating the diagnosis and early treatment of cancer should include the provision of consultant facilities in the homes of patients. They trusted that the Minister would direct the attention of local authorities to the desirability of the development of schemes on a regional basis, and that the Minister would make full use of the power given him by the Bill to require local authorities to combine for the purpose of making adequate arrangements for diagnosis and treatment.

Finally, they stressed the desirability of a system of uniform records of clinical findings so that proper statistical material might be available for purposes of investigation and research.

In reply to the deputation the Minister mentioned that in addition to the Medical Advisory Committee, now of some years standing, whose function it was to advise him on matters of common interest to the medical profession and the Ministry, he intended to appoint a Sub-Committee of this Medical Advisory Committee to advise him on general principles with regard to the treatment of cancer and to consider any questions on that subject which he might refer to them. He proposed to consult this Sub-Committee on the general exercise of his functions under the Cancer Bill, including the principles to be applied to the arrangements, which would have to be submitted to him for approval before they could be given effect. In this connection he would gladly keep in mind the views expressed by the deputation. He could at once say that, broadly speaking, he was in agreement with the deputation's opinion that maximum use should be made of the facilities provided by the existing voluntary and municipal general hospitals, and that clinics should normally be closely associated with these hospitals. As for consultants, they would normally not be available except at hospitals and clinics, but he agreed that it might be found desirable to make arrangements for consultants to visit the homes of patients in exceptional cases. In many regions it would clearly be desirable that a large and well-equipped hospital should serve the areas of more than one local authority, and this might be achieved either by a series of agreements with each local authority, or by one agreement with the combination of authorities. He fully agreed with the deputation as to the importance of the collection of records on a uniform basis and their utilisation for the purposes of investigation and research.

It thus seemed that there was no real point of difference between himself and the deputation on almost all their points.

THE PRODUCTION OF LYMPH FOR VACCINATION AGAINST SMALLPOX

Description of a New Method.

The production of lymph for anti-smallpox vaccination by cultivating the virus of vaccinia on the embryonic membranes of the developing chick within its eggshell, is described in a Report by Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. H. Stevenson and Dr. G. G. Butler, of the Government Lymph Establishment, published by the Ministry of Health.

The authors are satisfied that chick-lymph which they produced and investigated at the Government Lymph Establishment can safely be tried out on human beings under proper safeguards.

From the end of last century, anti-smallpox vaccination has been carried out in most countries with glycerinated calf lymph. The practice superseded what was called arm-to-arm vaccination, in which the original cow-pox or vaccinia was carried on continuously by transference from one human being to another. Glycerinated calf lymph is prepared by inoculating the skin surface of calves, collecting the vaccinal material, and mixing it, after grinding, with glycerine, water and a small amount of preservative. The preparation of the material, however, demands great care as the lymph thus prepared inevitably contains many varieties of organisms which are not desired. The lymph has, therefore, to be continuously examined and treated until these organisms are reduced to the number considered safe, so as to conform with regulations laid down by the Ministry of Health under an Act governing the issue of what are known as biological products.

Research, however, has shown that the virus can be cultivated in a pure state, though until recently this has only been done on a comparatively small scale. One of the methods used owes its inception to the work of three American investigators (Drs. Goodpasture, Woodruff and Buddingh). It consists in growing the virus on the embryonic membranes of the developing chick within its egg-shell. The cultivation of vaccinia on these membranes is the subject of the report. Stevenson and Butler issued preliminary reports on this subject in 1933 and 1934, and have now completed their survey of the characters of the virus throughout a long series of passages or cultivations from one egg to another, with special reference to the practical point of whether the method can be used for the large-scale production of vaccine lymph. They have conducted numerous investigations to determine whether lymph thus prepared is safe, effective and able to withstand exposure to varying temperature conditions.

The authors consider that strains of vaccinia virus used in different countries differ in essential qualities, and that this no doubt accounts for much diversity in experimental results, and they stress the fact that their findings apply only to the strain experimented with by them. They are of opinion that the chick membrane lymph investigated by them can safely be tried out on human beings under proper safeguards. In both America and Germany such trials have been made and indicate that the reactions on the whole are of a milder type than those given by calf vaccinia. Whether chick membrane lymph will replace calf lymph ultimately will depend not only on the result of these trials but also on further information in respect of the immunity produced against smallpox, which can only be decided in countries where that disease is prevalent. The experimental work indicates that the immunity produced will be similar in kind to that given by calf lymph, but as Sir Arthur MacNalty, Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry, points out in a prefatory note, it will be necessary to invoke the aid of the authorities in countries where smallpox is endemic in order to assist in the elucidation of this point.

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