

# The Midwife.

## CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

### REPORT OF THE WORK OF THE BOARD FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1940.

We have received the Report of the Work of the Central Midwives Board for the year ended March 31st, 1940, which is of very great interest and national importance, as no work is of greater value than that of the Certified Midwife at the present time.

The effect of war on the midwifery service of the country, and the changes necessary to meet the new conditions, have been the two outstanding questions calling for the constant attention of the Board.

Believing that the outbreak of war has in no way lessened the country's need for a midwifery service of the highest efficiency, and bearing in mind the impetus given by the last war to the maternity and child welfare movement, the Board has come to the conclusion that the best service it can render during the present war is to strive, to the utmost of its powers, to safeguard the midwifery service from avoidable impairment.

While it is fully recognised that for the time being the brake must be firmly applied to all new developments, the Board is of the opinion that hard-won standards must not be abandoned lightly or the war made an excuse for failing to face and overcome difficulties. Should conditions render retrograde action necessary, the Board would not hesitate to take such action, but its constant aim will be to find the means of overcoming war-time difficulties without lowering present standards. This course will not be the easiest one to follow, and for success the Board will need the support of others concerned with the midwifery service. It hopes that, despite the increasingly heavy demands placed upon them, the local supervising authorities and their medical officers of health will continue to lend their full support. It is confident it can count upon the enthusiastic help of the midwifery training schools and of the midwives.

While the interruption of the plans for further progress is to be regretted, it may well be that the tests to which the midwifery service will probably be subjected in the coming months, perhaps years, by concentrating attention on the essentials, will result in the strengthening of the service's foundations.

#### The Supply of Midwives.

The demand for practising midwives has increased as a result of the war. Many medical practitioners who have been conducting maternity work have been called up for war service. Some practising midwives were members of the nursing services attached to the armed forces; a proportion of these have been called up. Transfers of population have also had an effect.

With a view to preventing a likely decrease in the supply of practising midwives, the Minister of Health, on representations from the Board, issued the following instruction to local authorities at the end of August, 1939:—

"No midwife, whether she is a trained nurse or not, should be diverted to casualty or other non-midwifery work until the full requirements of the midwifery service in an emergency have been met."

Although the Board is aware that a few local authorities have not complied with this instruction, it has reason to think that in general the instruction has been observed.

In order that the means might be available for meeting quickly a shortage of midwives in any district, an emergency regulation was made under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1939. This regulation empowers any local supervising

authority, which finds that the supply of midwives in its area is not adequate for the needs, to make an order permitting any woman who surrendered her certificate under section 5 of the Midwives Act, 1936, to resume practice as a midwife for such period as may be prescribed. An order must name the woman to whom it relates and may specify the conditions under which midwifery work may be undertaken. A condition which applies in every case is that the rules of the Board regulating the practice of midwives have to be observed. An order may be revoked by a local supervising authority at any time.

#### National Service Register of Midwives.

Reference was made in the last annual report to the compilation of a register of midwives who had volunteered to undertake midwifery work in an emergency, either in their home districts or anywhere in the country. Towards the end of August, 1939, the first part of this register, which contained the names of over 1,500 midwives prepared to assist in their home districts, was distributed to the respective local supervising authorities. Complete information has not been received as to the extent to which the services of these volunteers were utilised by the authorities.

The Board wishes to pay tribute to the spirit of service which was evident in the profession. The fact that the system of improvised maternity homes was built up so rapidly and satisfactorily reflects great credit on those who carried out the work.

Although small parties numbering 10 to 20 continued to be sent to selected improvised maternity homes from time to time, it was found necessary to close a number of homes during the early months of 1940.

By the end of March, 1940, almost all the midwives from the London County Council hospitals had returned to London. Some London voluntary hospitals which had moved their maternity units to the reception areas had reopened these units in London, and resumed the training of pupil-midwives on a restricted scale. In addition, a number of independent midwives had returned to private practice.

At the time of writing this Report, the Board is engaged on plans for the immediate restaffing, should the need arise, of the improvised maternity homes which, at the present time, are being run by skeleton staffs, or are being kept on a care and maintenance basis.

#### Midwife Teachers' Certificate Examination.

In September, 1939, the award of the Midwife Teachers' Certificate, and the rules regulating the attendance by midwives at compulsory post-certificate courses of instruction, were suspended. The Board ultimately obtained the approval of the Minister of Health to bring into force again the granting of the Midwife Teachers' Certificate. The scheme for compulsory post-certificate courses of instruction is still in abeyance.

#### Training of Pupil-Midwives.

So far, the war has not rendered necessary any permanent changes in the scheme for the training of pupil-midwives. During the first few weeks of the war, some temporary concessions were granted to enable training schools to meet difficulties arising from the transition from peace-time to war-time arrangements. The large majority of the training schools, however, were soon able to conduct their training work on normal lines. Only 13 of the first period training schools have been forced to discontinue training and, at the time of writing this Report, three of these are considering a resumption of training.

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