

The Midwife.

CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

NEW SECTION E OF THE RULES

The Central Midwives Board has reviewed Section E of its Rules which regulate, supervise and restrict within due limits the practice of midwives. The purpose of this memorandum is to set out the main reasons which have led the Board to make considerable changes in the form and content of the Rules, and to indicate the principal differences between the new Rules and the Rules which they replace.

In view of the manifest changes and improvements which have been brought about in recent years in the midwifery services of the country, the Board considered that the time had arrived to implement as far as practicable the views of the Departmental Committee on the Training and Employment of Midwives (1929) in so far as they were applicable to Section E of the Rules. Relevant sections of this Committee's report are:

"We have reached the conclusion that the time has arrived when the present system of discipline, based as it is on a code of rules setting out in precise language what a midwife may and may not do, should be reconsidered and, we suggest, superseded. Such a code was, no doubt, necessary in the past, but we cannot regard the mode of its application as altogether consistent with the improved status and responsibility of the midwife which we believe it is in the national interest to promote."

[Para. 45, page 28 of the report]

and at page 54, para. 95:

"To continue to apply the punitive methods suitable for former days to the midwife of the present, and, more especially, of the future, would probably prove to be a mistaken policy—a policy which would militate in no small degree against the raising of her status to the level which all agree is her proper right and due. It is of doubtful wisdom to seek to apply, as criteria on which a midwife shall be punished for a dereliction of duty, rules purporting to cover, so far as human ingenuity can devise, every possible contingency that might be thought necessary to circumscribe her practice within proper limits."

The Board's view is in accord with the findings of the Departmental Committee referred to above.

In revising Section E of the Rules, therefore, the Board has removed from the rules those which refer specifically to the detailed technique of practice, and has limited the scope of the rules to the expression of the general principles governing a midwife's professional work. At the same time, the Board has given very careful consideration to those detailed rules of practice which have been removed, with a view to deciding which of them were still necessary in some other form to help a midwife in maintaining a high standard of practice. It has come to the conclusion that some of those rules are still necessary but that they should be phrased in such a way that they indicate a general standard of professional work which it is desirable to maintain rather than setting out in precise detail the methods by which such a standard should be attained. The Board believes that these standards are best indicated in a series of notices which are designed to establish a code of professional practice. A midwife who fails to comply with them may be involved in a charge of misconduct or malpractice. The notices are not to be regarded as part of, but as supplementary to, the rules in Section E, and for this reason they appear at the end of this section of the rules.

The rules which remain in the Section E are those which—

(i) relate to the duties required of a midwife under the Midwives Acts, 1902–1936 and other statutes, and

(ii) are framed to assist and direct the midwife in complying with the requirements of a local supervising authority in the execution of its powers and duties under the Midwives Acts, 1902–1936, and particularly those referred to in section 8 of the Midwives Act, 1902.

The Board has given special attention to the method of setting out the rules. The old Section E of the Rules applied to all midwives, whatever the nature of the duties which they performed except that, in rules E.1 and E.2 certain classes of midwives were exempt from some of the rules, depending upon whether they were pursuing their calling in institutions or as maternity nurses under the personal supervision of registered medical practitioners. The Board has felt for some time that it was difficult to apply many of these Rules, which were framed originally on the assumption that a midwife would be acting on her own responsibility and practising from her own home, to many classes of midwives who now practise in a variety of situations ranging from the maternity unit of a large general hospital to a small private maternity home, and from a municipal midwife working as a member of a team to a midwife who acts under the direct instruction of a doctor. In these circumstances the Board is of the opinion that, even at the expense of brevity, some repetition of the rules is desirable to make quite clear to a midwife the applicability of the rules to the circumstances in which she is practising and to repeat as necessary such rules as have general application.

It has been the practice of the Board for a number of years to issue a series of leaflets giving advice to midwives as to treatment and procedure in cases of venereal disease, cancer, pemphigus and ophthalmia neonatorum, etc. In the early days when the course of training was considerably shorter than at present and when standards were necessarily lower, a midwife needed guidance on such matters. In view, however, of the manifest improvements in training, the far-reaching effects of the Midwives Act, 1936, the provision in that Act for periodical refresher courses for midwives and the publicity afforded for up-to-date information and treatment on such matters in the professional Press and elsewhere, the Board is of the opinion that a midwife is no longer in need of such guidance and the issue of the leaflets will in consequence be discontinued.

The Board hopes that local supervising authorities will take all necessary steps to bring these new Rules to the notice of all midwives working in their area, either as midwives or maternity nurses, so that they may be aware of the various changes in their duties and responsibilities to their patients, the local supervising authority and to the Board, and of the steps which have been taken which the Board confidently believes reflect the solid improvements in the work and practice of midwives over the past decade.

This section of the Rules of the Central Midwives Board may be obtained from Messrs. Spottiswoode, Ballantyne and Co., Ltd., 1, New Street Square, London, E.C.4.

MIDWIFE TEACHERS DIPLOMA EXAMINATION, PART II, JULY, 1947

List of Successful Candidates

Cox, Maud Elizabeth, approved teacher and midwifery sister tutor, Wolverhampton Royal Hospital.

Donald, Helen, sister tutor and deputy matron, Wakefield Corporation Maternity Hospital.

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