

that the Council should charge a fee for this service to hospitals outside the National Health Service.

#### Next Meeting of the Council.

The next Meeting of the Council was fixed for January 28th, 1949.

## Problems Facing Mental Hospitals.

### Overcrowding Still Main Difficulty.

#### Board of Control's Report for 1947.

Further progress during 1947 in the gradual recovery from the abnormal conditions due to the war is recorded in the 34th annual report of the Board of Control to the Lord Chancellor\* published on Monday, December 6th. But although there was some improvement in reducing overcrowding in public mental hospitals this still remains "one of the main difficulties which have to be overcome," the Board states.

At the end of last year there were 144,736 persons under care under the Lunacy and Mental Treatment Acts, compared with 145,391 a year earlier. Of this total 128,817 were in public mental hospitals, involving, on the basis of recognised standards, overcrowding of 14,668, compared with 16,662 at the end of 1946.

Reasons given for shortage of accommodation are:—

(1) Practically no additional building since 1939; although no increase in the incidence of mental illness, more accommodation is needed every year to keep pace with the additional numbers of mental cases arising in an increasing population.

(2) At the end of the year 5,509 mental hospital beds were still diverted to war-time purposes. During the year some 4,908 beds, previously diverted, were returned, but at the end of the year 3,965 of them were still awaiting restoration or re-equipment.

(3) As a result of shortage of nursing staff, 1,981 beds were out of use.

#### Voluntary Admissions.

"The overcrowding is serious enough in itself," comments the Board, "but it has been kept within these limits partly because many mental hospitals have decided to limit admissions to certified cases, and have declined to receive voluntary patients. This is, of course, clearly detrimental to the whole system of voluntary treatment and involves grave hardship to persons voluntarily seeking treatment, often in the early stages of their illness, when there is the best prospect that early treatment might ensure recovery. However, taking the country as a whole, voluntary admissions to mental hospitals continue to make progress in relation to certified admissions, and during the year 1947 no fewer than 21,357 were voluntary admissions out of a total of 39,223, i.e. voluntary admissions constituted 54.5 per cent. of the whole."

Despite shortage of accommodation and staff, these handicaps have not, believes the Board, adversely affected the welfare of patients generally to any serious extent, and high praise is given to the special efforts made by medical and nursing staff to mitigate the discomforts and disadvantages resulting from overcrowding and staff shortages.

Urgent attention is being given to speeding up the reconditioning of accommodation returned to the mental health service and to undertaking extensions, but the rate of progress depends on the labour and material available.

Although the shortage of nursing staff continued to be a special difficulty "there are signs that in some areas, at

any rate, the position is slowly improving." The number of beds in public mental hospitals not in use because of staff shortage was less than 1.6 per cent. of the whole, and shortages were highly localised.

#### Health of Patients Good.

The health of patients was generally good. There were no noteworthy increases in illness, but there was a slight increase in the incidence of tuberculosis—8.8 per thousand against 6.5 for 1946, the average for the last 10 years being 8.1 per thousand. In public mental hospitals the death rate was 7.62 of the daily average number of patients resident, compared with 7.35 for 1946. "These slight increases, however, in a single year are not of special significance," it is stated.

#### Concerts for Patients.

The report refers to the wider acceptance of the value of occupational therapy in the treatment of mental patients, but notes that occupational training as well as cultural activities and entertainments are still hampered by shortage of medical and other staff.

Appreciation is expressed of the work of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John in supplying books, of the Women's Voluntary Services for help in organising social activities and of the movement initiated by Sir Steuart Wilson through which a "Council for Music in Hospitals" was formed. The Council aims at organising concerts of high quality and by the end of the year concerts were being organised in 10 mental hospitals.

A fuller account of the mental health service generally will appear in the Annual Report of the Ministry of Health. The Board of Control, however, is required to make annual reports to the Lord Chancellor on Mental Disorder under the Lunacy Act of 1890, which forms the subject of the Report now reviewed.

## Salary Claim by Trained Nurses.

The Staff Side of the Nurses and Midwives Whitley Council (which is one of the functional councils set up to settle the terms and conditions of service for persons employed in the National Health Service) will shortly make representations for increases in the salary scales now in operation for trained nurses.

These representations will have to be considered by the full Council, which will report on the result of its discussions as soon as agreement has been reached.

## More Children Immunised.

### "Target" is 635,000 for Year.

In the first six months of 1948, more children were immunised against diphtheria by local authorities than in any half-year since the end of the war. They numbered 347,000 bringing the grand total for England and Wales to 7,567,574.

The total for the important "under-five" age group during the first half of the year was 288,000. The target for the year is the protection of 635,000 babies before their first birthday. Because of the higher birth-rate, this target is 45,000 more than that set in 1947.

The pre-war yearly average was more than 50,000 cases of diphtheria and 2,900 deaths. In 1947 there were a little over 10,000 cases and 244 deaths. This freed about 2,500 nurses for other work.

Now that the National Health Service is in operation, the local authorities' facilities are supplemented by free immunisation by the family doctor, and this should prove an important factor in securing the increased effort needed to maintain the success of the campaign.

\*Annual Report of the Board of Control to the Lord Chancellor for the year 1947. H.C. No. 4. H.M. Stationery Office. Price 2d., post free 3d.

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