

Minimum Age of Entry to Training as Student Nurses.

THE GENERAL NURSING COUNCIL for England and Wales is most strongly of the opinion that no student nurse should be admitted to training before the age of 18 years, and greatly deprecates the admission of student nurses before that age. The following Rule has now received the approval of the Minister of Health and is incorporated in the Nurses Rules, 1951 :—

“As from the 1st day of August, 1952, the minimum age of entry to training shall be 18 years, and the name of an applicant shall not be entered upon the Index of Student Nurses until she has attained that age. Provided that where in the opinion of the Council the strict application of this paragraph would be likely to affect the hospital services prejudicially, the Council shall have power at their discretion to waive the requirement of this paragraph.”

Although this Rule will not take effect until August, 1952, it is the wish of the Council that it shall be brought to the attention of the Authorities of Nurse Training Schools at the earliest opportunity.

Nation's Health in 1949.

MANY NEW LOW RECORDS.

T.B. Deaths Down : Increase in Food Poisoning.

IN HIS FIRST REPORT* as Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, Sir John Charles takes stock of the nation's health in 1949.

His findings include :

On the *credit side* the following reductions in death rates :

For children in the first, second, third and fifth years of life they were the lowest on record. Although the remarkably low general mortality of 1948 was not quite maintained, the civilian death-rate of 11.8 per 1,000 population was lower than for any year since 1938, except 1948.

For babies in the first year of life a rate of 32.4 per 1,000 related live births, of 19.3 in the first month of life, and of 22.7 for still-births were all new low records.

For children under 15, the rates per million from scarlet fever (1), diphtheria (7) and whooping cough (55) were the lowest recorded, as also was the combined rate (38) for rheumatic fever (17) and heart disease (21).

For the first time, diphtheria deaths fell to under 100, the case fatality for measles continued to drop, deaths from tuberculosis showed a “remarkable decline” of 10 per cent.

On the *debit side* the following increases are noted :

Cancer deaths increased by 1,231 to 80,663, the considerable increase in male deaths from lung cancer masking the reductions which occurred in deaths from cancer of other sites in males and from cancer in all sites in females.

Food poisoning showed a substantial increase and draws the comment : “Food poisoning is largely preventable. All of us, caterers and those employed in the catering trade, and consumers generally, must do our best to see that it is prevented by strict adherence to hygienic practice.”

With the exception of 1947, 1949 was the worst year on record for poliomyelitis “and its prevalence seems now established on a much higher level than before.” Cases totalled 5,485, compared with 7,207 in 1947 and deaths 436 compared with 500.

“The facts that the ages under 45 death rates were, in general slightly lower than 1948 and that the infant mortality

*Cmd. 8343: Report of Ministry of Health for year ended 31st March, 1950, Part II On State of Public Health being Annual Report of Chief Medical Officer for 1949. H.M. Stationery Office, price 6s.

rate, in particular, fell to yet another low record (for the fourth year in succession) suggest that the increases in the death rate at all ages signify no more than the normal effects of climatic and epidemic variations on older people,” comments Sir John. “The causes of death mainly responsible for the increase were heart and vascular diseases, influenza and respiratory diseases which, together with old age, accounted for 61.2 per cent. of all deaths in the year—nearly 4 per cent. more than in 1948.”

His summing up is : “If influenza and poliomyelitis be excepted (and they are important exceptions) it was, as regards infectious disease, a good year even when compared with its record-breaking predecessor, 1948.”

During the whole of the period to which the report refers, Sir Wilson Jameson was Chief Medical Officer, and Sir John Charles opens his first annual report with a graceful tribute to Sir Wilson's “brilliant services during the ten years of unprecedented strain, but, nevertheless, years of astounding improvement in health as measured by vital statistics.”

Prevention Better than Cure.

Of the importance of preventive medicine Sir John has this to say : “The nation, in its recent preoccupation with the curative and specialist services, seems rather to have lost sight of what it owes to the preventive health services, which, for many decades, have been responsible for the saving of an infinity of human life and suffering.

“The preventive health services work unobtrusively and smoothly. Because their greatest victories are marked only by the absence of cases and deaths of disease, these victories have no news value or popular appeal, nor are their efforts noticed save when, on occasion, something goes wrong or, as in the case of poliomyelitis, lack of some essential knowledge prevents a reasoned prophylaxis. Thus, because their silent effectiveness is so unpublicised and because of the apparent neglect of these services, the more able of the younger practitioners tend to seek other branches of medicine, and recruits to the wide harvest field of public health are few. Yet, if one of the criteria of civilisation in a community lies in its efforts to promote and preserve the health (and consequently the happiness) of its citizens, preventive medicine must be given its place in front rank. For much as preventive medicine has already given to the welfare of mankind, much more remains for it to do in those fresh fields of prevention which lie before it, still shrouded in the mists of imperfect aetiology.”

Other points from the Report are these :—

Birth Rate.

The birth rate in 1949 was 16.7 per 1,000—a fall from 17.8 in 1948 but equal to a level midway between the mean annual birth rates during 1921–30 and 1931–40.

The “effective reproduction rate,” a measure of the ratio of the amount of reproductive capacity produced in the population to the amount consumed during the year, was 1.023 showing that the reproduction potential of the population was at least maintained.

Infant and Child Mortality.

The improvement in infant mortality which brought the rate per 1,000 related births down to 33.9 in 1948 compared with 41.4 in 1947 was maintained in 1949 by a further fall to 32.4. In the 25 years from 1896–1900 to 1921–25 the rate fell by 52 per cent. ; and if the average of the rates for the three years 1947, 1948 and 1949 is compared with the mean annual rate in 1921–25, 25 years before, the fall was again 52 per cent. This shows how steadily the general downward trend has been maintained apart from temporary disturbances and fluctuations.

A comparison is given of infant mortality in the last 28 years in various countries. Sweden (23) is now the best

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