

and also meets to a large extent the charges made for confinements in private maternity hospitals. Steps have been taken to improve maternity bed accommodation throughout the Dominion, and Hospital Boards have been required to meet their obligations in this respect wherever the necessity has arisen. The problem of fear of childbirth as being one of the factors responsible for induced abortion was reported on by the 1937 Committee. Of recent years the Health Department has undertaken an educational programme by pamphlets, over the radio, and by newspaper advertisements. The fact that pregnancy and childbirth are normal physiological conditions, and provided the mother takes reasonable care there need be no fear of motherhood,¹ has been stressed. Steps have also been taken to improve the equipment and conditions in both public and private maternity hospitals, and to require the observance of special techniques. The use of methods for the relief of pain during childbirth have greatly increased since the report was issued, and that use is now general. It may be said that, in St. Helens Hospitals, such relief is now available to every woman. The present Committee supports the view of the 1937 Committee that the family practitioner is the person best qualified to give advice on the spacing of families. The proposed setting-up of clinics associated with our hospitals to disseminate birth-control knowledge may cause certain undesirable results.

In the main body of their report the 1937 Committee expresses a tentative opinion that medical practitioners should be required to notify compulsorily to the Medical Officer of Health all abortions which come to their notice. The Health Department considers that this proposal would be quite ineffective. Septic abortions are already notifiable. The Department makes the comment :—

There are doctors who are loath to notify these, and some fail to do so unless there is a possibility of the patient dying.

There are also many abortions in which no complications arise, and these are never seen by a medical practitioner.

With regard to the 1937 Committee's suggestion that there should be a prohibition on the sale, except by medical prescription, of certain drugs and appliances which might be used for abortion purposes, certain action has been taken under the Medical Advertisements Act, 1942, which prohibits any advertisement with respect to the following disorders : amenorrhœa and female irregularities and sexual weakness or impotence. This Act also requires the publication of the true name of the person or company responsible for publishing any medical advertisements, and this may have some deterrent effect on this unsavoury type of mail order business. Action was also taken by the Department to declare ergot and its preparations to be a prescription poison, which means that its sale is restricted to chemists and that every sale must be made pursuant to a written prescription. In the opinion of the Health Department, it is not practicable to make any additional effective action concerning abortifacients. The practice of abortion is illegal, the present law dealing with it is very drastic, and any person supplying any drug or instruments for this purpose would be guilty of aiding and abetting an offence. It is unlikely that articles for this purpose would be sold or forwarded by post in such a manner as would enable an offence to be detected. The drugs which might be used in an endeavour to induce abortion are commonly used for other purposes, and it would be impossible to say that any drug sold or detected in transit through the post was intended to be used for such a purpose.

“ The Department knows of no special instrument which is used for the procuring of abortion, but, on the other hand, articles which have other legitimate uses—*e.g.*, a rubber catheter or bougie—may be misused to secure an abortion. The difficulty of defining what would be regarded as abortifacients seems to preclude action in this matter.”

It can thus be seen that a number of the recommendations of the 1937 Committee have been already legislated for or otherwise provided for. Basically the problem is one of the moral standard of the community. In some cases the basic cause is to be found in the lack of moral restraint on the part of certain unmarried people ; in other