

ADOLESCENT DENTAL SERVICE

The second or adolescent phase of the National Dental Service was inaugurated on the 1st February, 1947. The policy that was adopted, after consultation with the New Zealand Dental Association, provides for the development ultimately of a State-salaried service to deal with the adolescent group, with, in the meantime, a private-practitioner service under which enrolled patients receive treatment as a dental benefit under the Social Security Act. The scope of the service, eligibility for enrolment, the responsibilities undertaken by contracting dentists and by enrolled patients, and administrative details are set out in the Social Security (Dental Benefit) Regulations 1946.

Fundamental features are : (i) previous regular dental care, or, failing this, a high standard of dental health at the time of application, is a necessary qualification for enrolment ; (ii) the system is designed to ensure preservation of the natural teeth in a sound and healthy condition. Extraction of teeth is not included in the normal schedule of treatment, and must be specifically approved ; (iii) contracting dentists undertake to provide examination and necessary treatment at six-monthly intervals at fees specified in the regulations ; (iv) it is planned to continue this system until patients attain their nineteenth birthday, but in this first year of operation only those under sixteen years of age are eligible for enrolment ; (v) there is free choice of dentist.

In effect, the inauguration of this service marks a further step in the development of the system of controlling dental disease by means of regular examination and treatment at half-yearly intervals from pre-school age to the age of nineteen years.

The invitation to dental practitioners to undertake service under the scheme met with an immediate response, and by the 31st March, 1947, two months after the inauguration of the system, approximately 70 per cent. of the private practitioners had offered to accept patients, and offers were still being received. It had been a matter for speculation as to what extent the public would wish to avail themselves of the purely conservative dental care offered, but the thousands of applications for enrolment that poured into the District Offices as soon as the inauguration of the service was announced made it clear that full advantage would be taken of the facilities that were being provided. By the 31st March some 18,000 applications had been received and were being examined to determine the eligibility of the applicants for enrolment.

SCHOOL DENTAL SERVICE

The number of centres at which the School Dental Service operates shows a further increase to 456 treatment centres, as against 447 at the end of the previous year. At the 31st March, 1947, the staff numbered 679, including 206 student dental nurses in training. The shortage of school dental nurses in field clinics, a legacy of the war years, continues to be a major problem, and is likely to remain so until the greater numbers now being trained become effective in the field. So far the half-yearly output from the Training School has been sufficient to make good current wastage, but the position will not be satisfactory until there is sufficient staff to overtake the accumulated arrears of treatment and resume normal expansion.

The number of children under regular treatment is 226,798, an increase of 15,878 during the year.

The number of schools receiving treatment is 2,313, as compared with 2,348 at the end of the previous year. The reduction is due to the consolidation of schools in various areas.

The total number of operations for the year was 1,578,605. This included 906,553 reparative fillings in both permanent and deciduous teeth and 173,447 preventive fillings, a total of 1,080,000 fillings. In contrast with this figure, which represents