

REPORT.

SIR,—

Wellington, 19th November, 1912.

We have the honour to submit the following report on certain matters relating to the prevalence of tubercular diseases in this Dominion, especially with regard to those measures which we consider necessary to prevent their dissemination:—

I. In the first place we would take this opportunity to correct an impression to the effect that tubercular diseases are gaining ground in this country. Such is not the case; on the contrary, there is evidence to show that during the last ten years there has been a steady decline in the mortality-rate from these diseases, particularly with regard to the death-rate from pulmonary consumption. For further details we would refer you to the statistics attached to the report, provided by the Government Statistician.

II. In making recommendations for your consideration we must not omit to mention that during the last ten years a great deal has been done in this country with a view to prevent the spread of consumption and other forms of tubercular disease. We believe there are few, if any, countries which have so large a proportion of beds available to the population (one bed to every 3,500 persons) for the special treatment of these diseases. Moreover, the legislative machinery has enabled the Public Health Department to initiate many of those measures which in the light of modern knowledge are considered essential for a campaign of this nature, and this machinery will be the more effective when the Hospital Boards and other responsible authorities co-operate with the central Department in a campaign conducted on well-considered and uniform lines.

III. If the opinions of the delegates to the recent Hospital Conference can be taken as a gauge, there is little doubt but that the Hospital Boards will enter upon the campaign with vigour. Under the present law the duty of these authorities is to endeavour to prevent as well as to provide for the treatment of disease, and afford relief to the poor. This threefold duty on the part of the Boards should greatly simplify the conduct of the campaign.

IV. It will be noted, however, that in the opinion of the Conference little can really be accomplished unless the public are thoroughly aroused as to the need for the measures which are outlined in this report. An educated public is the most formidable weapon that can be used against the common enemy, and every effort must be taken—by dissemination of literature, lectures, and demonstrations—to inform the public of the nature of the foe against whom we are waging war. Of necessity the campaign must be a long and protracted one, and possibly for some years the good results will not be very obvious; nevertheless, it must not be allowed to languish, as has been the case in the past. The central and local health authorities will be powerless unless the public are behind them and in sympathy with their efforts.

V. The Conference was unanimous that the campaign must be conducted on uniform lines. The same methods, the same mode of attack, must be observed throughout the Dominion, whether by central Department, Hospital Boards, or other authorities interested.

VI. Though we must be ruthless in our warfare against the common foe, we must not be unmindful of the private interests of those who are its victims. The Conference agreed with Dr. Blackmore that “restrictive measures must not be pushed too far,” and that “tuberculosis is not a highly infectious disease.” We are not likely to conduct the campaign with any success if, from fear of interference with personal liberty, patients neglect to seek the assistance of the authorities. The success of the campaign largely depends on persons in the early stages of the disease seeking advice and treatment; and if such persons find that in their efforts to benefit themselves and the community methods are adopted that cause them to be regarded as pariahs of society, and their personal liberty to be thereby involved, the campaign will be productive of more harm than good. Without doubt, strong methods should be taken with regard to those patients who neglect to conform to precautions considered necessary in the interests of the public; but, with these exceptions, we consider it our duty to state with every emphasis that we will not be party to any restriction of the personal liberty of those who may without danger to the community obtain treatment in their own homes. The home treatment of consumptive patients is an important factor in the campaign that has been outlined.

VII. Though home treatment of many consumptive patients can be carried out with advantage to the patient and with safety to the community, we are strongly of opinion that every possible facility should be provided for those patients needing treatment in special institutions. We have already referred to the fact that the Dominion is particularly fortunate in having available so high a proportion of beds for the special treatment of this disease; nevertheless, we are of opinion that this accommodation should be materially increased, so that some 700 beds (double the present number) may be available for victims of this disease in its varying stages. In connection with the proposed increase in the accommodation, we would point out that the Conference was unanimous that when the Auckland Sanatorium is ready for the patients of that district it will not be necessary to erect any additional institutions for this purpose. The increased accommodation should be provided in connection with existing institutions (including the Auckland Sanatorium), or by means of annexes attached to our general hospitals. Opinions were unanimous to the effect that little good could be obtained by dotting the Dominion with small