

HOSPITALS AND CHARITABLE AID.

I regret that I am unable to comment on the hospitals and charitable aid expenditure, as the full and correct returns from Hospital Boards have not yet been received. It is proposed that these returns, with comments thereon, be issued during the year as an appendix to this report. There are, however, one or two matters in connection with hospital administration that require serious and immediate consideration. Firstly, the sliding scale of subsidy provided for in the Act has been by no means the success that was anticipated, and in common fairness to the poorer Hospital Boards it is necessary to place the scale of subsidy on a more reasonable and practical basis. It is hoped that the scale of subsidy adopted when the Act first came into force would run in the direction of increased assistance for the poorer Hospital Boards, especially where the administration was efficient. Such, however, was not borne out, and the necessity for revising the form of subsidy will be palpable to any one who takes the slightest interest in the matter.

Another question requiring attention is that of patients' fees. A perusal of hospital reports will show the diversity that exists in the various districts as regards the payment made by patients. Some Hospital Boards make every effort to obtain maintenance fees from those patients who are in a position to pay, though on the other hand some Boards apparently make no effort in this direction. I consider that this should be taken into consideration when the amount of subsidy payable to a Hospital Board is decided upon. Nowadays a large number of patients who are able to pay full hospital fees are admitted to our public institutions, and there is not the slightest excuse for Hospital Boards who do not make every effort to collect the fees and thus increase this source of revenue. During the year the Department has circularized Boards with regard to the advisability of adopting a uniform maintenance fee for the whole of the Dominion, but little success attended the effort; nevertheless Hospital Boards have agreed to fall into line as regards the maintenance fees to be paid to each other, which certainly is a step in the right direction, as under the old system the differences in the rate occasioned much quarrelling amongst Boards.

THE MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS ACT, 1914.

Three meetings of the Medical Board constituted under the above Act were held during the year, and granted registration to twenty-eight applicants. Amongst various matters dealt with steps were taken to purge the Medical Register of eighteen names of men who were either dead or had ceased to practice; four of these were reinstated.

SALE OF FOOD AND DRUGS ACT.

During the past year, in accordance with your instructions, attention was more painstakingly given to the inspection and supply of articles of food most commonly consumed, with the following results: 1,802 analyses were made by the Department's analysts, of which 1,473 were milk-samples. With regard to bread, 2,281 samples were weighed, and of these 157 were short-weight. The total of fines and costs where legal proceedings resulted from sampling or weighing amounted to over £650 for the year.

In May, 1916, there were gazetted regulations defining the term "whey butter," and setting out the method of labelling. The Department suspects that butter which properly should be labelled "whey butter" is being sold as ordinary butter. It is difficult to locate actual fraud, nevertheless steps have been taken which it is hoped will either confirm or remove these suspicions.

QUACKERY PREVENTION ACT.

A somewhat audacious attempt on the part of an Australian quack to sell a "cure-all" with the usual campaign of popular methods for the extortion of money from the credulous public was effectually suppressed under the above Act by the issue of notices to the principal newspapers circulating in the Dominion advising them that the claims for this cure-all were false in the meaning of the Act. Further steps taken were the prevention of correspondence with the proprietor and the prevention of the importation of the articles sold by him. This successful effort will no doubt act as a deterrent to other persons with similar designs. Despite the difficulties experienced in dealing with these attempted frauds in other countries, it is hoped that further action under the Act will either effectually curtail the activities of these persons or at least demonstrate the direction in which further legislative action is needed.

PLUMBERS REGISTRATION ACT, 1912.

The triennial election of the engineer, master and journeymen plumber members of the Board took place in May, 1916, and the former members—Messrs. W. H. Morton, J. S. Douglas, and J. Clark—were re-elected. Eleven meetings of the Plumbers' Board of New Zealand were held during the year.

The Board held an examination under the Act in September, 1916. Seventy-two candidates presented themselves, the result being as follows: Twelve candidates qualified in the theoretical part, eight in the practical part, and twenty-nine qualified or completed in both parts of the examination, and were duly granted registration. In addition ten other plumbers were admitted to registration during the year under the other provisions of the Act.

To date the names of 1,218 plumbers have been entered in the Register. Out of this total twenty-one names have been removed—twelve through death in civilian life and nine through death on active service. 981 pocket certificates of registration have been issued for the year 1917; 114 other registered persons have not applied for tickets for 1917.