

HOSPITALS AND CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS ACT.

Owing to the usual delays on the part of some Boards to furnish their annual returns it is not possible to comment upon increase and expenditure in regard to hospitals and charitable aid, but it is hoped shortly to furnish full and complete returns on this subject in the form of an appendix. It is strange the apathy of some Boards in regard to the preparation of their accounts. It would be imagined that those who are business men would be as desirous as the Department to be furnished with their statement of accounts for the year, and would take steps to see that their officers furnish them without delay.

In January, 1917, a conference of representatives of Hospital Boards was called by the Wellington Hospital Board for the purpose of considering the question of establishing or formulating a co-operative scheme for purchasing hospital supplies. The Hon. the Minister attended by invitation, and at his suggestion the conference adopted the following resolutions:—

"1. That each Hospital Board's Secretary be requested to prepare a schedule of the supplies obtained for the past year under the following headings: (a) Drugs and surgical requisites; (b) furniture and hospital equipment; (c) other recurring items. It is not considered possible at present to apply the scheme to provisions in any form. The extension to the scheme of articles of food which are imported may be matter for consideration later on.

"2. That a Committee of Management be established, to consist of—

"(a.) The Inspector-General of Hospitals, or such delegate as he may appoint to attend meetings;

"(b.) Other members of the Public Service whose Departments are large purchasers of stores;

"(c.) The Chairman of the Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Auckland Boards, or other delegates.

"3. That in the first place purchases be confined to those lines which are most largely used in all hospitals, leaving to the Boards the purchase in the ordinary way of those drugs and necessities which do not bulk largely in the annual expenditure.

"4. That in connection with requisites under the heading of "Furniture" an examination and report be made as to what are suitable standards of purchases (for example) of—(a) Bedsteads; (b) blankets; (c) sheetings and material; (d) crockeryware and similar classes of goods.

"5. That on the compilation of the probable orders for the year's supply tenders be invited by the High Commissioner for those goods that must be imported, and by the secretary of the bureau for those goods which can be manufactured in New Zealand; and that similar tenders be open to the importers of New Zealand, whose prices, including all charges, shall be compared with the tenders received from Great Britain, with charges added.

"Finance.—That upon receipt from each Board of its list of requisites for the year, together with a statement showing the amount paid by the Board for the goods scheduled during the previous year, the Board forward to the Inspector-General a cheque representing one-half the cost of the year's supplies, it being clearly understood that in no case will the cost under this scheme exceed what the Board has paid for the same goods during the previous year. It will be the business of each Board to see that its account is in credit with the bureau."

The matter, however, was not followed up by the conveners of the conference, owing, no doubt, to difficulties arising as a result of the war; but recently steps have been taken by the Department and the Wellington Board to endeavour to make a commencement, with the aid of the Munitions Department, for the purchase of certain lines, and it is hoped that this will enable the scheme to be successfully launched.

The need of a systematic and periodical inspection of the lay or business side of Board's administration has long been felt, and the Minister has decided that a Lay Inspector of Hospitals shall be appointed. This officer's duty will be to inspect and report upon methods of purchase and use of supplies; to report upon the stores system in vogue, test the same, and, where necessary, make a stores audit. He will report upon any waste or extravagance, and suggest methods whereby economy can be ensured, obtaining the necessary information to enable comparative costing statistics to be prepared. He will investigate and report upon the use made of institutional grounds, more especially as regards Old People's Homes, with a view to ensuring that they are being sufficiently utilized for the raising of produce for consumption in the Boards' institutions. He will also investigate and report on the office organization and accounts, and see that up-to-date methods are followed, and will thoroughly investigate the staffing on the domestic side of the institutions. The methods pursued in connection with charitable aid also require looking into, and it will be a duty of the Inspector to ascertain the necessity for relief given, the adequacy of the same, the methods in vogue to ensure that the relief is not granted beyond the necessary period, and that other steps are being taken to remove the cause of distress so as not to permanently pauperise the recipient of such relief. A matter, moreover, that is frequently neglected is the collection of patients' accounts. The Minister has on several occasions drawn the attention of Boards thereto, and articles have also appeared in the Department's *Journal* suggesting methods for collecting these fees. It will be an important duty of the Inspector to see that this work is not neglected but is being energetically and efficiently carried out. The appointment of this officer should do much to promote efficient and economical administration of hospitals and charitable aid.

SALE OF FOOD AND DRUGS ACT.

During the year 1917, 173 charges under the Sale of Food and Drugs Act were dealt with in the Magistrates' Courts, resulting in 162 convictions, eleven cases being dismissed. Fines were imposed in 158 cases, and in four cases the defendants were convicted and discharged. Ninety-two of the