

- (2.) Treatment applied after exposure to infection. This is called "early treatment." This term is inapplicable, as a disease cannot be treated before it exists. It is also likely to be confused with "abortive treatment," which implies treatment immediately on the appearance of symptoms.

The evidence before the Committee shows that this form of prophylaxis, if applied by skilled persons and within a few hours of exposure, is effective in preventing disease in a great majority of the cases in which it is used.

The Inter-departmental Committee on Infectious Diseases set up by the Ministry of Health in 1919 in connection with demobilization, in a note on "Prophylaxis against venereal disease," reported among its conclusions based on service experience, "That where preventive treatment is provided by a skilled attendant after exposure to infection the results are better than when the same measures are taken by the individual affected, even after the most careful instruction." After exposure to infection there appears no reason why these diseases should not be regarded in precisely the same manner as other infectious diseases, and precautions taken to sterilize the parts which have been exposed to infection.

It is to be noted that it is recommended that the prophylactic treatment is to be carried out by some properly instructed person. This need not necessarily be a medical man. It is suggested that this form of prophylaxis might be carried out by an orderly at the venereal-disease clinics. The notices posted in the public conveniences and other suitable places indicating the existence of the clinics and the necessity for treatment might include a guarded reference to their use for this purpose.

This form of prophylaxis applies to males. In the case of females the methods adopted would be also contraceptive, and the Committee do not recommend that facilities should be provided for this.

The Committee must not be supposed to advocate prophylaxis as in any way a substitute for continence and the cultivation of that high moral tone that repels any suggestion of promiscuous sexual relationships, but they feel that they could not properly ignore reference to a method of prevention of these diseases which has proved very efficient in the services, to which there appears no reasonable ethical objection, and which brings their prophylaxis into line with that of other infectious diseases.

SECTION 6.—LEGISLATION REQUIRED.

(A.) *Conditional Notification.*

The only subjects of importance upon which the witnesses examined differed materially in opinion were—(1) whether there ought to be any system of notification of cases of venereal disease, and (2) what steps, if any, should be taken to deal with persons suffering from such disease in a communicable form who refused to be treated, and in some cases were even known to be spreading the disease broadcast. Ladies who attended to give evidence on behalf of the National Council of Women and one or two other women's organizations objected to notification and compulsory treatment. They argued that there was at present a "scare" on the subject of venereal disease, and deprecated "panic legislation." They contended that the adoption of notification would deter patients from seeking treatment for fear of publicity. They were opposed to compulsory treatment of recalcitrant patients, arguing that any law of the kind would be used most oppressively against women. They contended that reliance should be placed on greater facilities for free treatment at the clinics, the work of women patrols, suppression of liquor, and above all education and propaganda on moral lines.

When confronted with typical cases of difficulty already quoted some of the witnesses admitted that it was not easy to see how such cases could be dealt with satisfactorily without compulsion of some kind. But they argued that, even so, it would be a greater evil if the fear of publicity and the fear of compulsion should have the effect of deterring sufferers from seeking treatment and so drive the disease underground.

The National Council of Women, by a substantial majority, at a recent conference in Christchurch, carried a resolution protesting against a proposal to introduce compulsory notification and treatment of venereal diseases, and urging the Government to increase the facilities for free treatment. The President of the Council, however, informed the Committee that most of the nineteen societies affiliated to the Auckland Branch of the National Council are in favour of some form of compulsion, but a number of the southern branches are opposed to it. Speaking as an individual, and not as President of the National Council of Women, she added:—

"Personally, I have no first-hand knowledge as to whether the disease is so prevalent in the community as to demand urgent measures, but there is an opinion among women social workers and medical practitioners, whom I have consulted, that something should be done, and they are in favour of compulsion under the Act, provided its administration is satisfactory. There is no doubt that there is a genuine and widespread fear among a large number of women that, although in the Act itself there is no discrimination between men and women, in actual practice there will be, and they fear that the Act will be enforced against women, and particularly immoral women, while the men concerned will be allowed to go free. This fear arises partly from the remembrance, particularly among elderly women, of the old Contagious Diseases Acts, both here and in England, and partly from the reports of the working of compulsion in Western Australia and elsewhere. I am of opinion that there is no serious ground for fear in view of the changed attitude in the public mind in connection with these diseases, the fuller knowledge that people generally have, and the high status of women in our country; also the ready access that all persons have to the protection of the law and the Courts in the event of false information being given, and the safeguards embodied in the Bill as I understand it is drafted. My view is that the objection to the compulsory clauses of the Bill would be removed in the opinion of many women if women patrols or women police were appointed, so that the administration of the Act in its compulsory clauses wherever it treated women could be in the hands of those women officers."