

Conference of the Australasian Branch of the British Medical Association.—The officers of the Department delivered a number of addresses on various aspects of public-health administration at this Conference, held in Dunedin. The excellent paper read by Dr. Ada Paterson, and compiled in conjunction with Dr. Marsden, D.Sc., late Assistant Director of Education, on "Physical Growth and Mental Attainment of New Zealand School-children" has been included as an appendix to this report.

Medical Research.—During the year under review this important matter has not been neglected. The research which has been undertaken includes both laboratory investigations and field inquiries. The former investigations, which were carried out at the Otago University Medical School under the supervision of Professor Hercus, included research work into the nature and prevention of infantile paralysis, rheumatoid arthritis, and goitre.

Difficulties have been encountered in regard to the infantile-paralysis work, more particularly on account of the lack of fresh *materies morbi*. While considerable progress has been made in the technique surrounding the problem and in the care of the monkey, a laboratory animal with which, so far, we have not been familiar, no definite advance can be claimed in knowledge of the disease. Dr. Steenson has continued the laborious work of repeating complement fixation tests as elaborated by certain workers in America. His investigations did not sustain the claims of these workers in regard to the diagnosis and treatment of rheumatoid arthritis by serological methods, his findings again being more or less of a negative nature. The inquiry into goitre has been continued, and detailed chemical investigations have been made into the proportion of iodine found in the soil and vegetables from different parts of the Dominion.

The field investigations carried out during the year included an inquiry into the incidence of cancer in New Zealand by Dr. Fulton. Although Dr. Fulton has completed his investigations, his report is not yet available. A second inquiry, which was undertaken by the medical officers of the School Division of the Department, was a study of the incidence of tuberculosis in school-children. The results arrived at were embodied in a paper presented by Dr. Mary Champaloup, at the recent Australasian Public Health Congress in Dunedin, which is published in another part of this report. A third laboratory investigation which was undertaken was one into the weights and heights of New Zealand children by Dr. Ada Paterson and Dr. Marsden.

Deaths under Anaesthetics.—Twenty deaths occurred, in comparison with twenty-four for the previous year. During the year the combined medical and dental professions of Taranaki considered information and suggestions submitted by the Department in reference to deaths taking place during anaesthesia in dental operations. As an outcome, two pamphlets were prepared by the Taranaki Division of the British Medical Association and the Taranaki Dental Association—one, for the dentists, giving general instructions as to preparation of patients, and the other containing advice to patients requiring general anaesthetic for dental operations. This co-operation of the two professions might well be followed in other centres.

SECTION 2.—HOSPITALS.

New Zealand Hospital Boards' Association Conference.—The annual Conference of the New Zealand Hospital Boards' Association was held in Christchurch, and there was an attendance of sixty-three delegates representing forty-four Boards, with the addition of some twenty-six Board Secretaries and Medical Superintendents. Many important matters affecting hospital-administration were discussed.

During the past year I have been urging on Hospital Boards the need for economy, especially in capital expenditure, and in one way or another I have been able to put off expenditure on new buildings to the extent of some £250,000. At first sight it was disappointing, therefore, to notice in our Hospital estimates that though there is a decrease in capital requirements, yet the total requirements of Hospital Boards show an increase and the resulting subsidy has increased by some £50,000; but reflection shows that that expenditure was for sums to which the Department had been committed for the last two or three years, which commitment was principally due to the capital expenditure in our four chief hospitals. Next year's estimates should show a marked reduction in capital expenditure. During the year plans were approved for the erection of addition or alteration to public hospital buildings estimated to cost £183,885, being a decrease of £341,356 on the previous year. A still further reduction in this direction is anticipated during the coming year as a great deal of work which was overdue has now been overtaken.

The past year has been a quiet but a very busy one. I have interviewed practically every Hospital Board in the Dominion during the past twelve months. I was very glad to note the great improvement in some of the hospitals of the West Coast, particularly Westport and Hokitika, which reflect great credit on the medical and nursing staffs.

Hospitals administered by Hospital Boards.—Full particulars in reference to these hospitals will be published as an appendix to this report as soon as the statistical data are available.

SECTION 3.—DIVISIONAL AND SECTIONAL REPORTS.

Public Hygiene.—The report of Dr. McKibbin embodies interesting comments and statistical data on the chief causes of mortality and infection. Attention is specially directed to his observations on cancer and maternal mortality.

The administration of the Cemeteries Act, a new function of the Department, is proceeding satisfactorily. The Director's report and the extracts from reports of Medical Officers of Health indicate the steady progress that is being maintained in public hygiene and sanitation throughout the Dominion by the local authorities. With the growth of population the work of Medical Officers of Health and their staff is becoming of increasing importance. The co-operation received from local governing bodies is very encouraging.