

PART V.—DENTAL HYGIENE.

I have the honour to submit the following report on the work of the Dental Division for the year ending 31st March, 1937 :—

It is pleasing to be able to record a year of unusual activity and of marked progress in the development of the “five-year plan” for the completion of the School Dental Service. While as yet it is too early to see results in the form of new clinics established in fresh districts, nevertheless the carefully laid plans which were made more than twelve months ago are nearing fruition, and the year 1938 should see a number of new clinics established. From then onwards, those committees and other organizations who during the last few years have applied, in some cases again and again, to have clinics established in their districts are likely to receive the reward of their foresight and of their patience. If the plans made can be adhered to, there is every possibility that the Centennial year of New Zealand will see the School Dental Service, if not completed, at least nearing completion, as far as the primary schools of the Dominion are concerned.

The obstacle to the immediate expansion of the School Dental Service is lack of the necessary trained staff. Up to the present, therefore, the main effort has been directed to the training of additional dental nurses, and to the provision of adequate facilities for doing this to the best advantage. Plans for a modern dental clinic and training-school to be erected in Wellington are nearing completion, and it is confidently expected that this new institution will be in operation early in 1938. Meanwhile, the Training-school for Dental Nurses at Government Buildings, Wellington, has been enlarged, and the Ministerial residence in Tinakori Road is being converted for use as an annexe to the training-school. By these means, the number of dental nurses in training is being steadily increased, and in due course the result of this preparatory work will be apparent in the establishing of new school dental clinics, and the extension of dental treatment to children in districts not previously served.

As is shown in the statistical section of this report, the work of the service, despite adverse conditions, has been well maintained during the year. The number of children under regular treatment has increased by 5,065, making a total number of 89,803, and the number of schools under treatment (1,629) also shows a small increase over last year's number of 1,590. Rather more operations were performed this year than last (725,069 as against 674,374 last year), and the ratio of extractions to fillings shows a further gratifying reduction to 14·6 extractions per 100 fillings. The number of treatment centres is the same as last year—viz., 252—of which 144 are main-treatment centres, and 188 are sub-bases. As soon as more staff is available, it will be necessary to regroup some of the centres. In the circumstances, these figures indicate a satisfactory position, and they are evidence of a praiseworthy effort on the part of a depleted staff of dental nurses, a staff which, fortunately, it has been possible to reinforce by the temporary re-employment of a number of married ex-dental nurses. Two factors have combined to hamper the work of the service during the year: (a) Shortage of staff, due to the small numbers appointed for training during the years of financial stress, and (b) the epidemic of poliomyelitis which has passed over the Dominion, on account of which the reopening of the schools after the Christmas vacation was delayed, and the school dental clinics lost from six to ten weeks of operating-time. The latter caused considerable disorganization of the system of six-monthly treatment, more particularly as the service had not yet recovered from the influx of new entrants which followed the readmission of five-year-old children to the schools last year.

The situation has called for the closest vigilance and careful guidance on the part of District Dental Superintendents, for special industry and adaptability on the part of the staff in the field, and for the exercise of a considerable degree of patience on the part of dental-clinic committees and parents.

However, the situation is under control, and, as more trained staff becomes available, the work will gradually be restored to a normal basis.

STAFF OF DENTAL DIVISION.

On the 31st March, 1937, the professional staff of the Division, disposed as under, numbered 17 dental officers, and 164 trained dental nurses. In addition, 79 student dental nurses were undergoing training, and steps were being taken to appoint a further 70 :—

	Dental Officers.	Trained Dental Nurses.	Student Dental Nurses.
Director	1	..	..
District staffs—			
District Dental Superintendents	4*	..	..
Staff of school dental clinics—			
Auckland District	2†	46	..
Wellington District	1	50	..
Canterbury District	2	39	..
Otago District	..	25	..
Wellington dental clinic and training-school for dental nurses	7	3	79‡
On extended leave	..	1	..
	17§	164§	79

* The Dental Superintendent of the Otago District is also in charge of the Central Clinic, Dunedin.

† Native Dental Officers working among Native schools in Bay of Plenty and East Coast districts.

‡ Of this number, twenty-nine will shortly complete their training and will be drafted for service in the field. The appointment of seventy additional student dental nurses has been authorized and is being proceeded with.

§ These numbers include three dental officers and thirteen dental nurses employed temporarily to augment the permanent staff. The latter are ex-dental nurses who have been re-engaged in a temporary capacity.