

During February, 1937, while the clinics were closed on account of the epidemic, all officers were required to undertake a series of studies and exercises in dental health education. Much of the work submitted showed not only originality, but also literary or artistic merit. Thus the time during which the clinics were closed was used to advantage.

More time is now being devoted to this important subject during training, and it is expected that the teaching that will be given by dental nurses in the future will be even more effectual in consequence.

PREVENTION OF DENTAL CARIES BY OPERATIVE TREATMENT.

In the annual report of two years ago reference was made to the use of the "prophylactic filling" as a routine procedure in the School Dental Service. The practice that has been adopted is to apply prophylactic fillings in practically all permanent molars, before the appearance of caries. The technique used in the service is to open the fissures, usually for their entire length, with the smallest size of inverted cone bur, this size being used in order to limit the width of the "incisions" it would be a misnomer to call them "cavities." Copper amalgam is worked into the incisions, condensed, and smoothed, and the surplus removed. The success of the operation lies chiefly in making the incisions as narrow as possible, and in securing clean sharp margins. The incisions should have a uniform width of less than 1 millimetre. The resulting filling is pleasing in appearance, and the experience in this service is that as a preventive measure it has proved successful beyond expectation. Since the introduction of this operation as a routine procedure several years ago, there has been a surprising reduction in the number of fillings required for the restoration of carious permanent molars.

THE CONTRIBUTION SYSTEM.

After being in operation for six years, the system of financial contribution continues to operate, on the whole, satisfactorily. Dental-clinic committees are required to pay to the Department (in quarterly instalments) the sum of £30 per annum in respect to each dental officer or dental nurse operating full-time in their district, and, in addition, to find approximately an equal amount for certain local expenses. The committees in turn are authorized to charge an amount not exceeding 5s. per year for each child under treatment, but there is a provision that no child must be debarred from treatment on account of the genuine inability of its parents to meet the charge. The onus of remitting the charge rests with the local committees. These have no difficulty in dealing sympathetically with the cases of parents who frankly state their circumstances and ask for exemption. There is another type of parent, however, who is apt to cause difficulty in the local administration—namely, the parent who fails to respond to communications, who does not sign the "consent" form for treatment, and who ignores the requests of the committee for payment of the annual fee, until the time comes, as it inevitably does, when he realizes that treatment is not only necessary but urgent. He then becomes insistent that his child should have immediate treatment at the clinic. Committees generally take the view that in such cases, where parents have failed to avail themselves at the proper time of the facilities offered, they should make their own arrangements to obtain the services of a private practitioner. They realize that if such children are admitted to a clinic at a late stage, they can be treated only at the expense of the majority, who are under regular supervision and in receipt of periodical preventive treatment.

Generally speaking, however, the system operates smoothly. The parents understand the requirements, and co-operate with their committees accordingly. The assistance of Headmasters and teachers has been invaluable in bringing about this understanding, and in helping committees to collect their fees.

The amount paid to the Department by dental-clinic committees for the year ended 31st March, 1937, was £4,066, and allowing that committees disbursed a similar amount locally for the maintenance of their clinics, their total contribution for the year towards the cost of the School Dental Service was approximately £8,000.

GENERAL.

Reference should be made here to the passing of the Dentists Act, 1936, in the administration of which this Department will be closely concerned. The Act provides for the establishment of a Dental Council, which will be responsible for the registration of dentists (instead of the Registrar-General as heretofore), and which will have certain disciplinary powers in connection with the practice of dentistry. The Act comes into force on the 1st June, 1937.

The hours observed by School Dental Clinics have been altered during the year on account of the introduction of the five-day week in the Public Service, longer hours being observed on each working-day. The indications are that the volume of work will not suffer by the change. The introduction of electrical units for the dental engines has had a beneficial effect in lessening the physical strain and accelerating the work. One hundred of these units have been installed during the year, and it is expected that in due course all clinics at which electric power is available will be so equipped.

Once again I have pleasure in acknowledging the ready assistance and co-operation of Education Boards and their staffs, and also of teachers in all parts of the Dominion.

The depleted staff of the Division has rendered splendid service during the year, in face of difficulties caused by the influx of five-year-old new entrants, loss of time due to the epidemic, and shortage of trained staff. On the other hand, the staff are greatly heartened by the knowledge that the development of the Dental Service has been resumed, and that with the increased activity of the training-school the reinforcement of the field staff is in sight.

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