

part in the issue of radium emanations. We have compiled statistics for research. We have had special treatment and supervision given to cancer patients where before they were often put aside to die. We have maintained a cancer research laboratory at Dunedin, and much useful work has been done. The investigation of cancer is like the gradual completion of a huge jig-saw puzzle of which little areas here and there have been filled together, but the full completion is still to be accomplished. The society has with the help of the Travis bequest established a radio-physics laboratory which is now to be removed from Wellington to Canterbury College, and which is invaluable for testing and safeguarding the methods used by deep-X-ray and radium for the treatment of cancer. Improvements in the use of radiation for treatment of cancer may remove to a large extent the fear of the knife which is a deterrent against sufferers seeking early advice and treatment."

The Department wishes to put on record its appreciation of the work of the society.

Venereal Diseases.—The tables appearing later in this report summarize the returns of treatment for venereal diseases at the four main centres. The consensus of opinion of medical officers in charge of V.D. clinics is that syphilis is on the decline. These opinions are supported by figures from other sources, including deaths from syphilis, locomotor ataxia, and general paralysis of the insane, and admissions to mental hospitals, of which the assigned cause was syphilis. Opinion is divided as to whether the increase in the number of attendances at clinics of patients suffering from gonorrhoea represents a real increase in this disease. It is possible that a better knowledge of the presence of the facilities for treatment may have led to their wider use. The arrangements which have been made for treatment of sailors in accordance with the International Agreement appear to be working smoothly, and it is satisfactory to record that the medical officers in charge of V.D. clinics have no reason to believe that infection is imported from overseas to any extent.

The need for better control of venereal diseases is realised by the Department, and for this purpose the revision of the present law is under consideration. The powers conferred by Act and regulations can be strengthened by elimination of known weaknesses.

REPORTS OF DIVISIONAL DIRECTORS.

Public Hygiene.—Dr. Ritchie, in his report, supplies detailed vital statistics. He has also prepared comparative tables of a number of principal causes of death for England-Wales and New Zealand. Another feature of his report is a statement on administration of the Food and Drugs Act.

School Hygiene.—The Acting Director, Dr. Elizabeth Gunn, in her report, covers a wide range of subjects. Matters dealt with include medical examination of entrants to the teaching profession, the supervision of mentally backward children, the supervision of contacts with cases of pulmonary tuberculosis, the medical examination of pre-school children, the milk-in-schools scheme, and health camps. It is encouraging to note that parents are taking an increasing interest in the medical examination of their children, and apparently appreciate this service. Much interest has been taken in nutrition. The percentage of subnormal nutrition amongst school-children has fallen from 6.65 per cent. in 1935 to 4.31 per cent. in 1936.

Hospitals.—The amendment to the Pensions Act has enabled Boards to show substantial savings in charitable-aid expenditure, but this has been more than offset by the increases in institutional costs mainly due to a reduction in working-hours and increases in rates of pay necessitated by the Government's industrial legislation.

Increase in staffs due to reduction in working-hours has also required Boards to take steps to provide further accommodation, particularly for the nurses.

The improvement in financial conditions generally is being manifested in the collection of patients' fees, but, owing principally to increases due to the causes referred to above, the financial requirements of Hospital Boards to be met by levy and subsidy are showing a substantial increase over those for the previous year.

Full statistical and financial information in regard to hospitals is published as a special appendix to this report.

Nursing Division.—The report of the Director, Miss M. Lambie, draws attention to the steps which have been taken by the Department to improve the hours and working-conditions of nurses employed in public hospitals. Continued attention also has been devoted to improving the health of nursing staffs.

Maternal Welfare.—Dr. Paget reviews the steps which have been taken to promote maternal welfare in New Zealand. In view of the public anxiety which was displayed about the abortion problem in New Zealand, the Government appointed a Committee to inquire into the matter. The personnel of the Committee was—D. G. McMillan, M.B., Ch.B (N.Z.), M.P., Chairman; Mrs. Janet Fraser; Sylvia G. Chapman, M.D., D.G.O. (T.C.D.); T. F. Corkill, M.D. (Edin.), M.R.C.P. (Edin.), M.C.O.G.; and T. L. Paget, L.R.C.P. (Lond.), M.R.C.S. (Eng.).

The report of the Committee has now been published. The Committee is convinced that the induction of abortion is exceedingly common in New Zealand, and that it has definitely increased in recent years. It is estimated that some 6,000 abortions occur every year, and of these some 4,000 are criminally induced either through the agency of criminal abortionists or by self-induction. The report further states that deaths from septic abortion have greatly increased in recent years, and now constitute one-quarter of the total maternal mortality; in some urban districts they amounted to nearly half of the total maternal mortality. New Zealand has, according to comparative international statistics, one of the highest death-rates from abortion in the world.