

dangers in the situation, and that the law should be altered to indicate more specifically the rightful position of the doctor in this matter; in other words, it is advocated that the present interpretation of the law should be incorporated in the law itself.

Much is made of the fact that an honourable practitioner occasionally finds himself in the unsatisfactory position of having actually to break the letter of the law in doing what according to accepted medical standards is in the best interests of the patient.

As safeguards against the possible dangers of a widening of the law, it has been suggested that new regulations should be introduced governing the practice of therapeutic abortion.

It has been recommended that operations should only be performed after adequate consultation, and that written certificates should be given by both parties to the consultation; that in certain cases the consultant should be a specialist; that all operations should be performed in public or licensed hospitals; that every therapeutic abortion should be notified to the Medical Officer of Health, to whom also the two certificates should be forwarded; and that every operation not performed under these conditions should be subject to strict investigation.

It has also been recommended by some that there should be a general notification of all abortions.

Those who are opposed to any alteration of the present state argue that any specific legalization of therapeutic abortion to save the serious impairment of health as well as to save life might lead to abuses of this sanction. They point out that even at the present time doctors differ considerably in their views and in their practice, and they fear that such divergences in thought and practice might be seriously exaggerated.

As to the suggested safeguarding regulations, there is by no means general agreement in the medical profession concerning their advisability or their value.

The Committee, having investigated the matter very fully, is satisfied that any disability under which the doctor rests in terminating a pregnancy for genuine, accepted therapeutic reasons is only theoretical.

No actual instance was brought before the Committee in which a doctor had been penalized or even subject to question when acting in good faith, nor was any evidence presented to show that any patient had suffered by reason of a doctor refraining from operating through fear of possible legal consequences.

Both medical and legal witnesses competent to speak on these medico-legal aspects were definite in their assurance that, under the existing law, no doctor acting in accordance with the accepted standards of the profession was in any danger.

The only person who need have any fear was one who ignored guidance of the existing standards of his profession, and to this extent the law was, at least in part, a deterrent against laxity of practice.

The Committee considers that, as it stands, the law has shown itself adaptable in practice to all reasonable changes in medical thought.

Further, the Committee was impressed by the possible dangers which might be associated with any alteration in the existing law.

While it is undoubtedly true that the majority of doctors are straightforward and honest in their interpretation of the indications for therapeutic abortion, it was made clear that even at the present time there are some who are inclined to terminate pregnancy for reasons which would not be accepted by most.

It would be quite impossible to lay down a hard-and-fast list of indications.

There are definite grounds for fearing that any alteration in the law would lead, in certain quarters, to a widening of the interpretations far beyond the intention of the alteration.

Under any alteration it would be exceedingly difficult to control the merging of the therapeutic into the social and economic reasons.

For these reasons, then, the Committee is not prepared to suggest any alteration in the law regarding therapeutic abortion; the Committee believes, however, that some benefit might accrue from the compulsory notification of all abortions to the Medical Officer of Health.

*Abortion for Social and Economic Reasons.*—Having received certain representations in favour of this practice, and having examined a large mass of evidence on this subject, the Committee is utterly opposed to any consideration of the legalization of abortion for social and economic reasons.