

1939.
NEW ZEALAND.

MENTAL HOSPITALS OF THE DOMINION.

(REPORT ON) FOR 1938.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly pursuant to Section 78 of the Mental Defectives Act, 1911.

The DIRECTOR-GENERAL to the Hon. P. FRASER, Minister in Charge of the Department of Mental Hospitals.

SIR,—

Wellington, 1st June, 1939.

I have the honour to present my annual report upon the work of the Department of Mental Hospitals for the year ended 31st December, 1938.

STATISTICAL.

There were 8,149 names of persons upon the registers at the end of the year, including 44 patients and boarders at Ashburn Hall Private Licensed Institution, and 637 patients and boarders who were absent on probation in the care of friends and relatives.

In actual residence in State hospitals on 31st December there were 7,472 persons, a decrease of 80 compared with the previous year, and of this number, 7,151 were subject to a reception order, whilst 321 were voluntary boarders.

There was a slight increase of 26 in the number admitted for the first time, the relative figures being 1,149 for this year and 1,123 for last year, and 282 former patients and boarders returned to the hospitals.

Of all classes of admissions we were able to discharge 924, or 64.50 per cent., calculated upon the admissions, but not more than 517, or 36.12 per cent., could be regarded as fully recovered.

These figures refer to all classes of admissions, including voluntary boarders, but most countries in compiling their mental hygiene statistics now differentiate between cases of acquired mental disorder and those of congenital origin, including idiots, imbeciles, and the feeble-minded.

In New Zealand, partly because it is only within recent years that we have established separate institutions for the congenitally deficient, this practice has not hitherto been followed, with the result that erroneous conclusions have tended to be drawn as to the incidence of mental disease by those unfamiliar with the system followed.

Not only does the grouping of these classes under one heading lead to fallacious comparison of our statistics with other countries, but it tends to mislead in other directions. For example, the establishment of the children's clinics at Auckland and Wellington has considerably increased the "ascertainment" of mental deficiency, and the provision of Templeton Farm Colony and Nelson Hospital as separate institutions for children has greatly increased the number of congenital cases coming under our care.

This is shown by the rise in the proportion of congenital cases in our certified institution population from 18.2 per cent. in 1927 to 26.6 per cent. in 1938.

The percentage of congenital cases admitted rose in the same period from 11.8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent., and as our "recovery rate" has been based upon the total number admitted any comparisons as to the results of treatment in the intervening years must be fallacious unless account is taken of the factors recited above.

The true position is disclosed in the subjoined tables, in which cases of acquired mental disorders are separated from cases of congenital mental deficiency.