

[Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Southwark, Borough of].

Contributors

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METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK

INTERIM REPORT

of the

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

Relative to the work of the
Health Services Department During the Year

1939.

Health Services Department,
Walworth Road, S.E.17.



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To His Worship the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors.

Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen,

By direction of the Ministry of Health in its Circular No.2067, the form in which the Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health is usually presented has been changed, owing to the prevailing war conditions which have thrown a very heavy burden on Public Health Departments of the Local Councils by reason of the organisation and administration of the Casualty Services in connection with Air Raid Precautions. The Ministry of Health feels that the time is inopportune to present detailed information and statistics of the Department's work and have stated that the report now furnished should be confined strictly to matters of special importance which have arisen during the year and that all statistical information should be held over until after the termination of the war, at which time it will then be possible for the Medical Officer of Health to give a comprehensive report on the health of the Borough during the war years.

In addition to the above, the need for strict economy in the use of paper is particularly referred to in the Ministry's Circular, the suggestion being made that Interim Reports may be typewritten and the circulation of the Reports curtailed.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

The health of the Borough during the year has been good, there having been no epidemic of infectious diseases, and it is interesting to note the falling off of infectious diseases immediately following the evacuation of the child population in September. The closing of the schools was probably a contributory factor, the children being disseminated over a larger area and not living in such close contact with each other.

It is gratifying to report that during the year only 42 cases of Measles were notified, whilst notifications in respect of tuberculosis showed a slight decrease to those received during 1938. In view of the efficacious results achieved in the administration of the drug "M & B 693" in cases of pneumonia and cerebro-spinal meningitis, the Council directed that supplies of the drug should be obtained and made

available in all cases where the drug was prescribed by a medical attendant, but where the patient could not afford the cost. In all cases where this drug has been issued by the Department, the general Practitioner has been asked to report specifically upon its effect in the treatment of the patient, and the reports so received have been most satisfactory.

EVACUATION.

Under the first Government Evacuation Scheme, provision was made for the evacuation of children under the age of five years, such children being duly registered prior to movement, but a condition of acceptance was that the little ones should be accompanied by a female relative or some other responsible female adult. The wisdom of such an arrangement was theoretically sound, but when carried into effect, innumerable problems evolved which were difficult to overcome. One great disadvantage was incompatibility between the evacuees and their hosts, occasioned no doubt by the impossibility and perhaps unwillingness on the part of the town dwellers to adjust their mode of living to that in rural districts. It is not hard to visualise the extreme difficulty with which Southwark mothers had to contend in trying to settle down with one or two toddlers in houses already occupied by others where probably the home conveniences were not the same as that to which they had been accustomed, together with the disadvantage of an absence of washing accommodation and a ready means of cooking food, with perhaps an indifferent water supply and sanitary conveniences of a less modern type. Coupled with these problems there was often worry for those of the family who were left at home, plus the additional and often impossible task of balancing the family budget, with the family itself split up in several places at the same time. It is small wonder, therefore, in the face of such psychological problems that there was a steady filtration of evacuees back to their own homes.

On the 2nd September, a large number of expectant mothers, in the last month of pregnancy, were evacuated under the direction of the London County Council, from the Health Services Department, special arrangements having been made for their conveyance from London accompanied by trained midwives, to places already reserved for them in Nursing and Maternity Homes and Hospitals in the Reception Areas.

The movement of these patients was effected without difficulty and the services of the midwives were not required during the journey. A further number of expectant mothers in a less advanced state of pregnancy were also evacuated in co-operation with the schools plan, special arrangements too having been made for their future confinement. Registration of these expectant mothers was undertaken by the staff of the Department and due to the effective method of registration the final task of evacuation was greatly facilitated.

CLINICS.

The outbreak of war caused a sudden change in the services provided at the Health Services Department, due to the taking over of a large part of the building for Civil Defence purposes. Several clinics had to be suspended pending their recommencement in other suitable buildings. The affected services were the Artificial Sunlight, Toddlers, Gynaecological, Test-feeding, Ante-natal and one of the Infant Welfare Clinics. Alternative arrangements were made immediately in respect of the Ante-Natal and Infant Welfare Clinics so that there was no interruption of the work. All other clinics which had been stopped, were recommenced before the end of the year with the exception of the Gynaecological Clinic.

The opening of the Council's new Infant Welfare Centre at Pakeman House, Pocock Street on 8th September added greatly to the ease with which it was possible to transfer the services disrupted by the partial closing down of the Health Services Department. The new Centre is conducted under the direction of Dr. Bergin, one of the Council's Assistant Medical Officers, Dr. A.V.B. Crawford the former Assistant Medical Officer for this area having terminated her appointment on July 15th.

In general, the Maternity and Child Welfare Services have been satisfactorily maintained during the year, and I am happy to state the number of cases of puerperal fever and pyrexia has been small, whilst the number of women who died as a result of childbirth was three; in each of these cases death was through unavoidable causes.

Much greater use was made during the year of the Home Helps provided by the Council, particularly in the second half of the year, which was due in some measure to the number of confinements taking place at home, beds not being available in the Hospitals after the commencement of hostilities except in cases of obstretic difficulty.

MUNICIPAL NURSERY.

The Council's Day Nursery was evacuated in co-operation with the London County Council, on 1st September, to Haxted House, Edenbridge, Kent. Almost immediately after the removal of the Nursery, it became apparent that the conditions under which it was being conducted were far from satisfactory. The house, an occupied one, was not structurally suitable or of sufficient size to accommodate a Day Nursery for an indefinite period. Lack of accommodation for children and staff, and of suitable and sufficient amenities, coupled with the illness of the householder's wife, resulted in early representations being made to the Ministry of Health to find other premises. This, however, proved to be rather a difficult matter as most of the suitable premises in Reception Areas had already been taken over in connection with billeting under the general Evacuation Scheme. Subsequently an unoccupied house, "Whitnorth" Shalford, near Guildford, Surrey was taken over and equipped, the Nursery being removed on the 8th December and placed under the local supervision of the Medical Officer of Health of Guildford, pending final arrangements for the maintenance of the Nursery between the Southwark Borough Council and the Surrey County Council.

Immediately after the establishment of the Creche at Shalford, the Guildford Rural District Council appointed a Matron in order to relieve the Lady Sanitary Inspector attached to this Council, who had been acting as Matron to the Nursery, which arrangement was necessitated by the discharge of the permanent Matron. Reports received from the Nursery have indicated that with the exception of a few minor ailments the whole of the children are in good health in their new environment.

CHEAP MILK SCHEME.

During the year the Council gave consideration to a scheme formulated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in conjunction with the Milk Marketing Board, for the supply of milk at cheap rates to mothers and children. Due consideration was given to the Scheme, but the

Council were of the opinion that the time was inopportune for the commencement of such an arrangement and decided to postpone consideration of the matter indefinitely.

GYNAECOLOGICAL CLINIC.

Whilst the Gynaecological Clinic was being conducted, it was frequently found that some of the patients were in need of hospital treatment, and accordingly an arrangement was entered into between this Council and the Grosvenor Hospital for Women, whereby assistance in the cost of treatment would be afforded in necessitous cases, where the specialist has made this recommendation.

SANITARY CONDITIONS.

In regard to the general sanitary provisions and supervision of the district, these were fully maintained throughout the year, but certain delays in the compliance with notices after the outbreak of war could not be avoided owing to difficulty in obtaining building materials.

A considerable amount of extra work had to be undertaken at the Council's Cleansing Station at King James' Street in August and September due to the large numbers of children sent to the Cleansing Station by the London County Council immediately it became known that evacuation would shortly commence.

CORONER'S COURT.

The Coroner for the District, Mr. A. Douglas Cowburn, retired during the year, and in a communication which he later addressed to the Council, he expressed sincere appreciation of the great improvements effected by the Council in respect of the post-mortem room and mortuary attached to the Southwark Coroner's Court during his ten years of office, referring, at the same time, to the cordiality which had at all times marked the official connection between the Council's officials and himself.

OVERCROWDING.

The problem of overcrowding, which until the outbreak of war was rapidly being overcome by re-housing, became the matter of considerable concern, for war conditions presented a number of difficulties which would otherwise not have arisen. Theoretically, immediately after the evacuation of the child population, overcrowding was deemed to have been abated, but as had already been pointed out there has been a gradual trickle of population back into the Borough, thus causing re-overcrowding in families where it was presumed to have been abated.

Men have been called to the colours and others have left the district to take up work of special importance elsewhere, and as a set-off against this, families who were living outside London before the outbreak of war have now moved in. Such a rapid movement of population has made it impossible to keep an up-to-date record of overcrowding, and the information gained in the Overcrowding Survey of 1935 is now of little value in the estimation of the present disposition of the population.

HOUSING.

The suspension of housing activities added considerable difficulties to the work of the Department. Many areas had been scheduled and represented to the Authority, but owing to the fact that action had not been taken by the Authority and no relevant Ministry of Health enquiries held, no further action could be taken. As a result of the severe winter these worn out houses could not stand up to it and the Department was inundated with complaints from the occupiers for repairs to roofs, windows, doors, and walls saturated with dampness. Our difficulties were increased by the inability of owners to obtain certain building materials except after long delays.

FOOD INSPECTION.

The inspection of food and food manufacture proceeded normally, until the outbreak of war. This calamity increased the responsibilities of the Food Inspectors, particularly on the Wharves where the work has considerably increased owing to greater supervision being necessary due to war conditions. Apart from condemnation of food unfit for human consumption, our job has also become one of safeguarding against wastage.

STAFF.

In order that First Aid Posts and the Casualty Services generally could be established and administered on a satisfactory basis, I found it necessary to delegate a number of the Council's Sanitary Inspectors and Health Visitors to these services, pending the enrolment of whole-time properly qualified volunteers, but allowance was duly made for dealing with all matters affecting the general work of the Department which were of an urgent nature. Resumption to normal duties of these officers was effected at the earliest possible moment at which they could be relieved.

Owing to the enormous amount of work being placed upon the Department by the Civil Defence measures, the Council appointed Dr.T. Penry Evans, Part Time Assistance Tuberculosis Officer to act as Medical Officer for the purpose of Air Raid Precautions, and to this officer I should like to express my appreciation of his efforts in regard to his assistance in the organisation and supervision of the Casualty Services in the Borough.

TUBERCULOSIS.

Until the declaration of war the work of the Tuberculosis Dispensary had continued as in the previous year. During the first month of the war there was some disorganisation of the routine, but by the beginning of October the work was going on with but minor alterations, which will be indicated.

Owing to the black-out it was found advisable to curtail one evening session, and there was no longer any necessity for the Saturday morning session for children.

Early in September the Assistance Tuberculosis Officer - Dr. T.P. Evans - was transferred to full time A.R.P. duties, but some of his sessions were undertaken by Dr. Fairfield Thomas to maintain a full dispensary service. Dr. Pritchard continued to act as Consultant in Tuberculosis at St. Giles's Hospital.

DIAGNOSIS.

The diminution of numbers of cases sent for diagnosis was surprisingly small. The number of men referred by Army Medical Boards gradually increased during the year. This is very important work both from the point of view of early diagnosis and in preventing undiagnosed cases of tuberculosis from admission to the Army.

INSTITUTIONAL TREATMENT.

In the early days of the war, large numbers of patients were discharged from institutions to make room for the war casualties which did not materialise. At first there was some difficulty in obtaining sanatorium beds for chronic cases, but at no time has difficulty been experienced in procuring adequate treatment for urgent cases.

SPECIAL TREATMENTS.

A great effort was made to maintain the continuity of special treatments (i.e. Artificial Pneumothorax and Gold Injections). Refills were restricted to the Wednesday morning and Thursday evening sessions and this alteration worked very satisfactorily. Dental treatment continued almost without interruption.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY.

The Handicraft Class was displaced from its workshop at the beginning of the war as the room was needed for a canteen. Arrangements were quickly made for the work to be continued in the Waiting Hall of the Tuberculosis Dispensary. The attendance and interest of the patients was well maintained and the output and sales of work continued to be very satisfactory.

CONTACT EXAMINATION.

This work was continued as far as possible and special efforts were made to examine adolescent and adult contacts, these being the cases where early tuberculosis is most likely to be found. The number of children attending for contact and routine examination was considerably reduced owing to the evacuation scheme.

SUPERVISION OF HOME CONDITIONS.

This branch of the Dispensary activities was reduced to its essentials in the early part of the war because many of the Health Visitors were required for A.R.P. duties, but with the return of the Health Visitors to their own work, home visiting was resumed in the normal way.

TUBERCULOSIS CARE COMMITTEE.

This work was continued without interruption though the number of meetings of the Committee had to be somewhat curtailed. Special mention should be made of the enormous amount of work done by the Invalid Children's Aid Association in dealing with the many problems arising out of the evacuation of children.

In presenting this report, I desire to express my appreciation of the continued good-will shown to me by the Chairman and Members of the Committee of the Council, and also the ever-willing advice and assistance rendered to me by the Chief Officers of the Council.

To my staff I wish to tender my sincerest thanks for their unfailing loyalty and industrious work during a year which has seen continuous additions and alterations to the normal peace-time routine of a Public Health Department.

I am,

Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yours obediently,

W. STOTT.

Medical Officer of Health.

