

## THE MINISTER OF HEALTH REVIEWS HIS POLICY

*By a Parliamentary Correspondent*

The Minister of Health, Mr. J. F. T. Naudé reviewed his policy in a statement in the Senate last week.

The Minister said that the division of responsibility between the Central Government, the Provincial Administrations and local authorities in regard to the provision of curative health services had not proved very satisfactory. For some time he had, in consultation with the Administrators of the four provinces, been investigating the possibility of effecting improvements. The proposals on which these negotiations were based were aimed at placing all curative services, whether inside or outside hospitals, under the control of the provinces. The object was to obtain better coordination of the services concerned and to avoid overlapping and waste of money.

If the provinces took over the curative services, it would enable the Department of Health and local authorities to concentrate on preventive services and the general promotion of public health.

Mr. Naudé said that as far as infectious diseases were concerned the maintenance, improvement and, where necessary, the extension of existing services—having due regard to the country's ability to carry the financial burden involved—were still the Government's policy. In particular, attention was being concentrated on those diseases which constituted a serious threat to the country's resources, and in this regard the combating of tuberculosis was the primary aim.

'If it is borne in mind that approximately 15,000 persons—the majority of whom are non-Europeans—die from tuberculosis every year and that most of these deaths occur at an age when life is at its highest stage of productivity, it is easy to imagine what threat this disease constitutes to the country's man-power,' said the Minister. 'It is realized that the provision of proper housing and healthy nutrition would contribute much towards the solution of this serious health problem, but this is a long-term policy which must necessarily stretch over a period of many years.'

The Minister said that in the meantime immediate steps must be taken to meet the problem and he was pleased to state that good progress had been made in combating the disease. Until recently isolation and hospitalization were the most important methods in combating tuberculosis. The discovery of streptomycin, para-aminosalicylic acid (PAS) and isonicotinic hydrazide (INH), with which considerable success had been achieved, had made possible a new approach to the control of tuberculosis.

The application of these remedies has made it possible to cure the patient in hospital to such an extent in a short time that he could thereafter be treated at home or in settlements. It was his policy to continue with a programme of ambulatory treatment for which an additional £500,000 had been provided in the Department's estimates for the current financial year. This would bring the Department's total expenditure on tuberculosis for the present year to £2,946,722.

'The application of an ambulatory treatment programme does not mean that hospitalization or isolation would no longer be necessary,' said the Minister. 'On the contrary, they are still important factors in the fight against tuberculosis, but they will be supplemented with ambulatory treatment as soon as possible. This will not only result in a bigger turnover in hospital beds but in the long run will also prove to be more economical, because it will no longer be necessary to provide the additional expensive hospital accommodation.'

Mr. Naudé said that for this reason local authorities were being encouraged by the Government by means of liberal subsidies to provide the necessary accommodation in non-European areas.

'As a result of the progress which has been made with the treatment of tuberculosis, together with the increasing provision of beds, particularly at settlements, there has been a noticeable decrease in the tuberculosis death-rate in the past few years. Although there has been no noticeable drop in the incidence of tuberculosis, it is expected that the number of people contracting the disease, will also decrease considerably in the near future.'

The Minister said that in order to ensure the success of such an extensive programme of ambulatory treatment, it was necessary to trace tuberculosis cases as early as possible. For this reason an order for mobile X-ray units had been placed by the Department more than a year ago to supplement the units already in operation. Unfortunately delivery had been delayed owing to a technical

hitch. According to the latest reports these units had now been shipped to the Union. With the aid of these units the Department would be able to undertake radiological surveys on a larger scale than was hitherto possible.

### *Malaria*

Dealing with malaria the Minister said that the sporadic outbreak of this disease, together with the fact that mosquitoes in other parts of the world had developed immunity against DDT, gave cause for concern. The Department of Health had therefore convened a conference which would be held this winter and at which the malaria problem would be discussed by the Union's own experts with those of neighbouring African territories and representatives of the World Health Organization, who had been invited to attend.

'It must be pointed out that my Department every year issues a warning to the public living in former malaria areas, that the disease has not been eradicated but that it has only been brought under control, and that all precautions must still be taken,' said the Minister.

### *Bilharzia*

Mr. Naudé said that another problem which was being actively tackled by his Department, was that of bilharzia. There were certain problems connected with the control of this disease which constituted a serious threat to the country's man-power. The matter, however, was receiving the constant attention of his Department.

### *Poliomyelitis Vaccine*

Speaking of the polio vaccine prepared by the South African Poliomyelitis Research Institute, the Minister said that further issues of the vaccine would be made during the coming winter, when the possibility of the incidence of coincidental cases would be at its lowest. The Minister reiterated that the vaccine 'was as safe as any vaccine could possibly be'. The South African vaccine had been administered to approximately 20,000 children without ill effect. Laboratory tests had confirmed that the South African vaccine built up immunity against polio.

There had been a considerable decrease in the incidence of polio in the Union. In January this year only 58 cases were reported as against 323 cases in the corresponding period last year. No child who had been inoculated had contracted the disease.

### *Diphtheria*

Speaking about diphtheria, the Minister said that in spite of repeated warnings by his Department and local authorities, and the fact that facilities for free immunization were available at municipal clinics, there was no sign that the incidence of this disease was decreasing.

'In my opinion it is unforgivable that small children should suffer and that their health should be undermined because of negligence or ignorance on the part of the parents. I want to make an urgent appeal to parents whose children have not been inoculated against diphtheria, to have it done as soon as possible. Unless parents give their whole-hearted cooperation, it would not be possible ever to eradicate this disease.'

### *Local Products*

Dealing with medical requirements manufactured in the Union, the Minister said that locally manufactured requisites were of a very high quality which compared favourably with the imported article.

'It has come to my attention that preference is frequently given to imported medical requirements and I wish to express the hope that where locally manufactured preparations are available which are just as good as the imported article, preference would be given to our own products.'

### *Mental and Feeble-Minded*

The Minister announced that he had appointed a committee to go into the question of accommodation for mental cases and the

feeble-minded, in the first instance in the Western Province, where the situation was very serious. Arising out of the committee's recommendations, the Department of Public Works had been requested to go ahead with the planning of a mental hospital for

Europeans in the Western Province and it was hoped that the necessary financial provision would be made in this year's budget. Afterwards an institution for non-Europeans would also have to be provided.