

MINISTER OF HEALTH REPLIES TO THE HEALTH DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT

FROM A PARLIAMENTARY CORRESPONDENT

Mr. J. F. T. Naudé, Minister of Health, replying in the House of Assembly, to the debate in Committee of Supply on the Health vote, said he was of the opinion that there should be a certain measure of control over medical aid societies so as to ensure that the public was properly protected.

The Minister said he did not wish to create the impression that doctors' and specialists' fees were not fair, but they were surprisingly high and could ruin a man with a moderate income who had to cope with a couple of cases of serious illness. Medical aid societies could be of great benefit in this regard.

He added that he hoped to introduce legislation this session to enable the Medical Council to exercise control over practitioners who concluded agreements with medical aid societies. It had been brought to his notice that such practitioners were placed under an obligation to the societies, and this should be subject to control by the Medical Council.

Dealing with the shortage of nurses, Mr. Naudé said there was a general shortage of man-power and nurses were no exception. He thought that parents could do much to encourage their daughters to take up nursing, particularly as these girls would be under the care and supervision of a matron. Working conditions and salaries had improved considerably.

'I have been assured that there is another reason for the shortage of nurses', he said. 'There is practically no profession for women where the incidence of marriage is as high as in the nursing profession. I do not say they abuse their position when the unfortunate man is ill and has no adequate protection, but the fact remains that many of them do marry'.

The Minister announced that the question of mixed representation of the races on the Nursing Council was being investigated by a Select Committee. While he did not wish to anticipate the report of the committee, he hoped its report would make it possible to submit proposals for the separate registration of the two races. 'Next year provision would have to be made for the separate

racés', he said. 'The only reason why it is not being done now, is because we are waiting on the report of the Select Committee'.

There was full collaboration and contact between research institutes in the Union and similar institutes overseas. Dr. Ancel Keys was brought out by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and he cooperated on the question of heart disease with local scientists. A few thousand Natives were examined and only one case of heart disease was found.

POLIOMYELITIS

Discussing the question of poliomyelitis, Mr. Naudé said it had practically been accepted that Natives were not easily attacked by the disease. It had been stated that because they grew up unhygienically, they had become immune. This year, however, it appeared that the majority of cases at East London—where a serious number of cases had been reported—were Natives.

Approximately 16,000 children were inoculated against poliomyelitis last year. This year the Poliomyelitis Foundation Laboratories would have sufficient vaccine to inoculate all children for whom inoculation is requested.

The vaccine was tested regularly and there was no question about the safety of the South African vaccine. The vaccine would be available in July and application for supplies must be made in the same manner as last year. Where parents desired that the inoculations should be done by their own doctors, the latter could apply for the vaccine direct.

In reply to a question, the Minister said sufficient vaccine would be available for non-European children as well.

RIFT VALLEY FEVER

Referring to the recent outbreak of Rift Valley Fever, the Minister said the disease was transmitted to human beings by a mosquito,

but it could also be transmitted where human beings ate or handled the meat of animals that had died from the disease, or where they drank the milk of infected cows. It was difficult to say what could be done to avoid contracting the disease.

Dr. Swinburne of the Rockefeller Institute and Dr. Whelan of the South African Medical Research Institute were at present investigating the outbreak in the Free State in collaboration with the Department of Health and the Division of Veterinary Services.

TUBERCULOSIS

The Minister announced that 19 mobile X-ray units had been acquired and these would start operating as soon as the necessary staff could be obtained. The intention was to hold a mass inspection throughout the country in order to ascertain the incidence of tuberculosis.

It was not intended to test everybody, but only those who had been in contact with active tuberculosis cases or who were presumed to be suffering from tuberculosis. As soon as the survey

was completed, it would be possible to take the necessary further steps.

In this regard the Government would have to rely on local authorities. Without their assistance and the work done by SANTA it would be impossible for the Department to tackle the job, as it simply did not have the necessary staff.

'This is such a big question that we feel we can appeal to all medical people, to local authorities as well as the public, to assist in the fight against tuberculosis.

MENTAL PATIENTS

Dealing with the position of mental patients, Mr. Naudé said he thought it was scandalous for patients to be kept in gaol instead of being sent to an institution. He had managed to get the co-operation of the Public Works Department and the Treasury, and it was being considered what steps could be taken immediately to alleviate the shortage of accommodation in mental hospitals.