

I feel, therefore, that the opportunity of this annual report should be taken to attempt a general review of our hospital services, a stocktaking as it were, that may help in the future development of these services upon orderly and economical lines.

For the purposes of the present survey, reference is made to the latest available statistics affecting hospital services, which, with some exceptions, are those for the year ended 31st March, 1949, extracted from the separately published Appendix to the Director-General's annual report. By way of indicating the general trends, the figures for the year ended 31st March, 1940, are given under various headings.

Even in the relatively short period of ten years there have been so many changes affecting the units of calculation that the statistics are of only limited value for comparative purposes. There is a fairly general appreciation of the changing value of the pound, although this is frequently overlooked when comparing carefully computed costs over a period of years. It is not so well recognized, however, that with changes in the technique of diagnosis and treatment, and under the influence of many other factors, the "average in-patient" of ten years ago was a rather different unit from the "average in-patient" of to-day. Again, changes in nursing technique, in the range of nursing duties, and in the organization of nursing staff make the "average nurse" to-day a different unit from that of ten years ago.

Altered methods of compiling data further add to the difficulty of comparison over a period of years and make the figures no more than rough indications.

In the following survey no account is taken of mental hospitals, which are dealt with in the report of the Mental Hygiene Division.

AVAILABLE BEDS

For the year ended 31st March, 1949, the number of hospital beds available was 16,634 (1940, 12,504), equivalent to 9.0 per 1,000 (1940, 7.7 per 1,000) of the Dominion's mean population of 1,851,291 (1940, 1,633,447).

These beds were provided as follows:—

Table 18

	1948-49.	1939-40.
(a) By Hospital Boards	13,743	9,436
(b) By Health Department	393	303
(c) By licensed private hospitals	2,488	2,765
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	16,624	12,504

Not all the beds shown as "available" for 1948-49 are in fact correctly so described. By reason of acute shortages of staff (particularly nursing staff) in certain hospitals, nearly 1,000 general beds in all in our public hospitals were closed for the time being. A more recent survey places the number of beds temporarily closed on account of staff shortages at about 850.

The respective numbers of hospitals were:—

Table 19

	1948-49.	1939-40.
(a) Hospital Board hospitals	168	122
(b) Health Department hospitals	7	6
(c) Private hospitals	205	294
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	380	422