

Maternity Hospital System in New Zealand

Drastic Reform Urged

New Zealand's system of private maternity hospitals is subjected to frank criticism in the report of the Royal Commission which sat in Auckland last March to inquire into the conditions of puerperal fever cases at Kelvin Private Hospital.

"The system," states the commission, "is unsatisfactory, mainly because the provision of private maternity hospitals rests entirely upon the usually slender financial resources of the licensees, who, as a rule, are registered midwives, and not often the owners, but merely the lessees of the premises.

"It is almost without exception beyond the financial ability of these women to supply the class of building and equipment which the welfare of the patients and the national importance of the work urgently demand; and as a commercial venture the income generally derived from these hospitals presents no alluring prospect to the capitalist. The result, therefore, is that the majority of these hospitals are private houses converted, as far as the finances of the persons concerned permit, to the important purpose of a hospital.

Need for Drastic Reform.

"This arrangement," continues the commission, "can never be quite satisfactory. While it must be recognised that the system now in operation has been of much service to the community, its defects cannot longer be endured, and a complete and drastic change is called for.

"The only solution of the problem which presents itself to the commission is that private maternity hospitals which do not completely comply with the regulations to be formulated as to building, staffing, equipment and so on, should be subjected to a process of gradual extinguishment, and that in their place efficiently-equipped accommodation for maternity cases be provided by the Government or hospital boards, or by both in conjunc-

tion, for all classes of the community—rich, poor, and those of moderate means—the patients being required to pay for the service rendered in accordance with their financial ability."

A False Sense of Security.

The commission contends that the cost of maintenance would be relatively reduced in proportion to the size of the institution, and holds that even if some permanent loss were incurred it would be reasonable to view this as perhaps more justifiable than any loss incurred in other State enterprises. As matters now stood it had transpired that the Department of Health, because of the great and increasing demand for this class of service, was practically forced into the position of issuing licenses for private maternity hospitals in cases where it was realised that the buildings and equipment were not entirely suitable.

The commission therefore points out that the issue and continuance of a license by a Government department induces a natural assumption by the public that the institution concerned is suitable and safe. "If," adds the commission, "many of these institutions are not in fact suitable and safe, then this sense of security is a false one."

"Expectant mothers should not be deluded into a sense of security which the assurance of Government inspection induces, when that security does not in fact exist. The position of the staffing of the Auckland District Health Office is absurd. It should be immediately and substantially strengthened and the inspection of private maternity hospitals rendered a real protection to maternity patients, which at present it is not."

Revision of Legislation.

It was with some astonishment that the commission had learned that the regulations of 1907 dealing with private hospi-