

# SHORTAGE OF DOCTORS AT HOSPITAL

## 3 AUG. 1935 Government Reply to Doctor's Charges ACTING PREMIER'S STATEMENT Comment By Authorities On Latest Situation

Following the issue of statement yesterday by the 12 resident surgeons at the Adelaide Hospital, in which they allege that serious understaffing at the hospital is resulting in the neglect of patients and is affecting their own health, the Acting Premier (Sir George Ritchie) said last night that the Government had done and was doing everything possible to relieve the position. He realised that the situation was serious; probably quite as serious as was stated by the resident surgeons.

"What has not yet been stated," added Sir George Ritchie, who was spoken for by Straithairn, "is that throughout the medical officers who have engaged at the hospital during the past week to relieve the positions. The Government has diverted in every way its resources in Zealand for house surgeons for the Adelaide Hospital, but there have been no applicants. We have advertised in England in an effort to persuade students to come to Adelaide. South Australia cannot be expected to supply more than the resident officers receive in New South Wales and Victoria. These three States are the only ones in the world where hospitals employ salaried medical schools."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Mr. A. L. Read) said that he was not prepared to say whether the statement of the resident medical officers was correct or not, but the matter would be referred to the Inspector-General of Hospitals (Dr. B. H. Morris), who would report to the Acting Premier.

"It is a cause of great regret that a statement such as that of the resident medical officers should be made in a way which might have an alarming influence on patients and those associated with the hospital work," he added. "The Government can be assured that, with the splendid service being rendered by the honorary officers, Mr. Morris, and the staff of the hospital (Dr. J. C. Steeman), everything possible is being done in the interests of the patients, salaried staff."

"No Complaints From Patients"

"I am not prepared, from my personal observations of any lack of attention or neglect of patients," said the medical superintendent of the Adelaide Hospital (Dr. J. C. Steeman) last night, "nor have I received any complaints from patients on this score," he added. "It is possible that the admission of new patients, and that the patients may be somewhat delayed, but I feel perfectly certain that no essential treatment for the relief of urgent symptoms has been delayed."

Increase In Pay "Not Only Solution"

The dean of the faculty of medicine at the Adelaide University said that the hospital was unusually busy at present, and this increase coincided with a time when the resident staff was short-handed. This in itself was not an adequate reason for an increase in pay, but this was not a complete solution. The difficulty lay in the fact that as the number of students at the hospital has grown to a great extent in the past few years, but the number of students at the medical school had not increased correspondingly.

"If an increase in pay were given in the form of a bonus to those who complete the full 12 months' course, it would probably induce a large number of medical officers to remain for the whole year," said the dean. "I think that the salary of resident officers should be increased to the level of the end of the 12 months should be £50. The medical course of six years is a long one, owing to a fall in one year. It can readily be seen that at the end of the 12 months the average student's

monetary resources are at a low ebb and that the temptation to accept a position with a higher salary at a hospital in another State would be strong. The student then has an opportunity to save some money to assist him to establish his practice later."

View-Checkers' Statement

"I think that the position at the Adelaide Hospital is quite correct as it is made out. But I know that action is being taken to relieve it," said the University-Checkers' statement (Sir William Mitchell) last night.

The number of graduates from the Adelaide University is expected to be about 20 each year, and this is the number necessary to meet the requirements of the State," he continued. "At present in Adelaide there are 120 students to man the Adelaide Hospital with three resident officers for one year. At present in Adelaide there are 120 students are going in for medicine compared with a few years ago.

"On account of the increase in the number of beds in hospitals of medical schools, the number of available is, at present, too small," added Sir William Mitchell. "The Government has to be the governing bodies. They are—(1) To engage men for the second year, and (2) To ensure that they are no longer serving as students, and would require adequate salaries; and (3) to employ men."

"The medical schools, including the three in Australia," he continued, "it is the aim of all students at a time year. At present, the number of students of the medical school. At times there are in a large number of students graduating, but the present situation is not the best for training at the hospital."

"The real question," said Sir William Mitchell, "is what payment should be made. I think that at the three medical schools in Scotland at one time no payment was made. The students received their maintenance at all, but only board and lodging. That state of affairs may still exist, but I have an idea that an annual salary of £50 is now paid. No hospital medical school pays more than £50 a year, and this is practically the amount paid in Sydney and Melbourne; but to induce students to remain in residence for the full 12 months, the Government should pay in Sydney to make the salary £60, together with the payment of a bonus of £50, which is paid to students at the end of their course. Of course, hospitals that have no medical school pay more."

"It would be a pity, in my opinion, to reduce the salaries of the men who are doing their final year are still students, and that the £100 which they receive is really a scholarship to enable them to complete their studies. I might add that I spoke to Sir George Ritchie this morning and discussed the whole question of the shortage of medical staff."

Resident Doctors' Statement

The statement issued by the 12 house surgeons is as follows:

"Statements about the medical staff of the Adelaide Hospital which have been made elsewhere have so outraged those who know the hospital conditions, that we, the resident medical staff, wish to set before our duty to make known the facts. The full staff of the Adelaide Hospital should be—two casual surgeons, five surgical house surgeons, and six special house surgeons, a total of 18. At present, the hospital has only 12. Two casual officers, three medical house surgeons, three special house surgeons, and one resident house surgeon, a total of 11."

"Of the 11 residents, two are on permanent casual duty work, and the other nine are residents who have under their care approximately 550 patients. Several residents have between 100 and 200 patients with a weekly average admission of five to 10 cases. As a result, practically only new cases and very sick patients are not new cases, but in many cases, essential for their well-being. During the last 12 months, with a certain clinic, 200 cases passed through his hands, and during the last two years, with a clinic, 130 were operated on at an admission rate of 3.3 a day, and an operation rate of two a day."

"The average number of patients to each resident in the leading hospitals in Victoria and New South Wales is 30. The average number of patients to each resident in the Adelaide Hospital is 45. This is due to the fact that the residents of the hospital are unable to administer anaesthetics or to perform several other duties of great importance. This is due to the fact that the students have not had enough experience to enable them to diagnose the conditions of a medical registrar or house surgeon to their aid."

"In many cases, especially accidents, where requests for compensation

claims are possible, it is essential that legally qualified men should be in attendance. It is obvious that the employment of students, while relieving the residents of a certain relief of routine work, leads only to duplication of the greater part of their work."

"Members of the Government have frequently stated that the honorary medical staff is helping by doing extra work. It is true that the honorary staff is, however, obviously impracticable for honorees to perform the duties which usually fall to the lot of the resident staff. The honorary staff is a group which stresses that the hospital was last fully staffed early in 1933. The number of residents who were present three residents short. Within a few months there were still three residents, two were resigned and one was transferred. In the last three months there were four more residents have resigned. The departure of these residents has been under exceptional circumstances due to their obtaining more remunerative positions in other hospitals."

Part of Course

"A year in residence is supposed to be an integral part of the medical course, during which house surgeons are expected to correlate their academic knowledge with practical training. Such a course is frankly impossible under the present regime at the Adelaide Hospital. Cases cannot be treated, although the residents cannot be followed up and treatment cannot be given as frequently as is necessary."

"This week the honorary staff was supplied with a list of specific cases in which it was implied that all the residents on duty were already engaged, so causing unnecessary suffering to the patients. The only relief made by Sir George Ritchie that the public is being adequately treated cannot be regarded as a relief."

"Hours on duty are such that it is impossible, in the opinion of the resident house surgeons, to do any extra work at this pressure and maintain their health. A typical example of the hours on duty, all day, every day, is as follows: In wards and operating theatre, 15:—Official hours on duty, 100. In patients' hours spent on duty in hospital, approximately 120."

"At night every resident is on duty from midnight onwards, and on numerous occasions has to be called to the operating theatre in the wards."

"In replying in Parliament to questions put by Sir George Ritchie and others have stated that as soon as the present six-year medical students have passed their final examination, the shortage will be overcome. A similar statement was made a year ago. It is now a year later, and the shortage has not improved for a time, but again a deplorable situation arose. Conditions are unlikely to remain unchanged unless the Government take appropriate steps to retain recent graduates."

"The proper solution is to make Adelaide Hospital medical posts more attractive by offering a salary of at least £150 a year, with a bonus of £50 at the end of the course. If this is done, junior resident medical officers will not leave before having completed their course, and other officers will tend to remain for a further 12 months."

Statements in Parliament

"If the present were the first occasion on which the shortage had been discussed, there would be some ground for believing that the Government for the evasive replies which Ministers have made to questions by members of the Adelaide Hospital Association. (Mr. Jeffries) have made broad and meaningless statements, such as, 'The Government will see that the proper steps are taken' (Hansard, August 28)."

"The Government has been treating the position for a long time as a 'black box' problem. Mr. Jeffries has assured Mr. Richards (A.L.P.) that the Government is concerned that the hospital is not being fully and completely staffed' (Hansard, August 28). The resident medical staff wishes to know what such a statement means. It is a statement which, in the two years of crippling shortage at the hospital, Sir George Ritchie and Mr. Jeffries have repeatedly made such statements to give the impression that they are ready to do what should have been done long ago. If they really wish to improve the health of the community at heart, let them act as one. The Ministry also has, in the past, made such statements on occasions to give the impression that the understanding is purely a temporary matter."

"It is assured by the Chief Secretary, said Mr. Jeffries (Hansard, August 28) 'that the position is satisfactory, and honorees will be engaged under ordinary circumstances, the hospital will not be adequately staffed. Let Sir George Ritchie and Mr. Jeffries' (Hansard, August 28)."

circumstances of the hospital in the past two years have been disgraceful under the present regime. The epidemic was not to create the situation, but to make a definite state of affairs. It is a disgraceful state of affairs."

"Also, according to 'Hansard,' Mr. Jeffries said, 'The Government will see that the hospital is properly staffed. The Government will see that the hospital is properly staffed for that purpose.' The resident medical staff wishes to ask—What arrangements are being made? Are they satisfactory? Are they satisfactory to the overworked resident staff? Are they satisfactory to the patients? Are they satisfactory to whom the hospital is the only place they can go for medical treatment?"

Doctors Leaving State

"Up to the present, the only arrangements that have been made are a part of the Government's plan. The hospital Mr. Jeffries replied to a question by the leader of the Opposition (Mr. Lacey)—'The fact that some young doctors migrate to other States is their own business, and the Government does not intend to do anything to prevent it. It is essential to realise that, without exception, the doctors have left the State because, in their opinion, the salaries and conditions of their new positions are better than the pittance and overwork offered here. These men would have stayed in South Australia if the salary offered by the Government had not increased. There lies the solution to the whole problem."

"The Government's argument of Sir George Ritchie, which may be expected to be repeated—that young doctors owe a debt to the State, as they have received a Government grant for the expense of the Government. There is no doubt that anyone privileged to attend the University or any Government or Government institution owes a debt to the State, but Sir George Ritchie has never suggested that the Government should be extracted from any other profession."

Professor Mr.'s Daughter

"I WAS talking to Mr. W. L. McDonald, who breeds Border Leicester sheep at Mount Barker, and Mrs. McDonald, who is a member of the Royal Society of the Field Naturalists' section of the Royal Society in Adelaide."

## BIG CROWDS AT MEDICAL SHOW

### 2 SEP. 1935 Public Interest In Exhibits and Films

There were attendances exceeding expectations at the two days' jubilee which ended on Saturday night.

Saturday night's attendance was particularly large. The museum in the anatomical building, where there were many curious and unusual exhibits seldom seen by the public, proved to be of great interest. In the anatomy theatre, films were repeated continuously throughout the evening. Each session was crowded. The films illustrating digestion and circulation in the department of Biochemistry on the top floor of the Diering Building also attracted full houses. Many visitors had their speed of thought tested, and there was a rush for the photographic of "beats" recorded by the electro-cardiograph. Demonstrators, most of whom were medical students, were surrounded by the public in the Diering and physics buildings. A series of X-ray films of swallowed foreign bodies aroused considerable interest.

The pathological museum, so seldom entered by the layman, was crammed with extraordinary specimens. Here were given an eye to many of the live rats in cages, alongside which a notice told visitors that rats were very important in connection with public health matters.

Mothers, particularly young mothers, flocked to the Jarral building, where they saw the new type of medicine exhibited were on view. How many mothers would think of giving their baby, and from it to another, a "milk" meal such as this—A gruel (cooked), minced, potato (cooked in jacket), vegetables (well cooked), and have no peeled, and water?