

The Renaissance of Voluntary Enterprise in Medicine

by Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld 1955

In every age the struggle for progress towards a sound society crystallises around a different issue: for example, the struggle for religious freedom, or for the right of all citizens to take part in the government of their country. In our time and in our profession the struggle lies between the power of the bureaucrat as the exponent of the tremendous forces of regulation and standardisation, and that of the human spirit as reflected in free initiative and individual human relationships which will permit and encourage flexibility and spontaneity in the organisation of the medical services to the community.

The position held by the is that the maintenance of health and the treatment of disease are complex phenomena in which human relationships play an essential part, relationships that is between individual human beings and not between an individual and a system. For such relationships to be effective and acceptable the power must exist on both sides, that of the patient and that of the physician, to create spontaneous modifications of the established system where this becomes oppressive or unsuitable. In any sound social system such power is an essential expression of life against the deadening force of mechanical organisation, just as sound organisation is essential as a check to erratic and irresponsible individual behaviour.

In the years before the war and in the movement which gave rise to the concept of a National Health Service, a broad basis of national organisation was lacking in these essentials. In 1955 what we have to fight for is the maintenance of human relationships, of flexibility of organisation, and of the right of the patient to play a decisive part in the conditions of his own treatment. There are encouraging indications of vigour in all respects.

The Institute of Child Psychology

Founded in 1928, this Institute was a pioneer in the provision for children of out-patient treatment in which a number of aspects of the patient are dealt with simultaneously. At its peak point in 1931 (before the world financial depression reduced it, with so many others, once more to its original limitations) the Institute provided treatment for children suffering from disturbances of their emotional life, chronic psychological disorders, and those unable to adjust themselves socially at home or at school or who had

educational difficulties. This treatment combined paediatrics, educational and clinical psychology, and psychotherapy, a specially designed form of physical activity, and furthermore added to the work of the social worker a psychiatrist with experience in the treatment of adults and a gynaecologist interested in the minor gynaecological ailments of married women which form the background to so much family strain.

Presented in 1937 with freehold quarters in 6 Pembridge Villas, the Institute was faced in 1948 with the situation that, if it were taken over by the N.H.S., it could obtain no guarantee for continuance of its work nor for freedom of administration. It, therefore, decided to remain a 'non-included body.' Its courage has been justified. The Institute receives for study and treatment children suffering from disturbances of physical, emotional, educational and social health, maintains a close relationship with general practitioners, and carries on active research into methods of investigation and treatment. Private patients can also be seen by members of the clinical staff at the Institute. The old hospital tradition of voluntary service is maintained by its medical staff but a financial arrangement made with the NW. Met. R.H.B. covers certain medical and clerical expenses. After a long uphill struggle from 1946, when the premises requisitioned for six years during the war were given back again, the I.C.P. is now re-established, and has the happiness of seeing the point of view for which it has stood for so many years, the interaction of emotional and physical factors in childhood and the need for a combined medical and psycho-therapeutic service, becoming slowly recognised.

Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme

In the sphere of hospital treatment very stimulating progress is being made. The British United Provident Association reports a subscription income of £935,000 for 1954, with an increase in 1955 estimated to be well into the second million, representing the demand of an increasing section of the public to have private treatment when ill and to maintain their personal relations with their medical advisers. Other Associations with similar aims show corresponding progress.

Encouraging as these signs are something more is needed to establish such enterprise, not only in the metropolis but all over the country, and further steps towards accomplishment of this aim are being taken to assist in the provision of adequate hospital and nursing home services of a good standard for paying patients throughout the United Kingdom. The increase throughout the country in membership of Associations such as the B.U.P.A. shows that the numbers desiring private treatment are considerable.

The report of the Governors of the Kingston and Maiden Medical Foundation shows a similar determination on the part of the public to have their own hospital. £5,200 is

coming in yearly, nearly £15,000 gross has been accumulated. an excellent house in a convenient position bought, and the Foundation expects to have completed alterations and equipment and to open with a minimum of 10 beds in 1956.

The progress of these voluntary enterprises, covering the wide ground they do, offers most encouraging evidence of the growth of a sound public demand to secure freedom and elasticity in some of the most important aspects of medicine.