

EDITORIAL

"BUILDING THE NATION'S HEALTH"

"For the ambitious young doctor the glamour of consultant practice and the prestige and financial rewards of specialist status are powerful attractions, so much so that 91 of the 451 doctors in the Medical department have taken higher qualifications in clinical fields and many of them hold superscale appointments. Preventive Medicine it seems, has no such allure."

(from the Report on the Outbreak of
Cholera in Malacca, 1963)

The Committee of Enquiry found that the basic weakness in our health service is that it does not attract the better type of doctor to choose Public Health as his career. As soon as the Report was published, the Government made a statement which was released on 8th January 1964. According to this statement the Government agreed to give the Diploma in Public Health the same status as other specialist medical qualifications, to create more posts of Senior Health Officers and to provide a fixed monthly allowance for the D.P.H. holders and others working in the field of preventive medicine. The year is coming to an end, but none of these things have been done. Perhaps it is time to appoint another Commission to enquire into the situation!

Public Health cannot gain its rightful place in the scheme of things unless there is proper support from the Government. One of the things that can be done is to make a proper selection when doctors are chosen to hold posts at Ministerial level. No one should be appointed at the national level unless he is suitably qualified, has shown some outstanding qualities of leadership and is dedicated to the task of building the nation's health.

The present health services in the country are centered around the hospital. It is in effect an **ill health service** and not a health service. Although numerous health centres have been built, it will be unusual to find any health centre that has its full complement of staff. It will be rarer still to find a medical officer, qualified in Public Health, working in any of these health centres. Unfortunately the whole Rural Health Service has been

mainly a building programme. The vital problem of attracting good personnel has received little consideration.

Increased allowances and monetary attractions by themselves cannot change the situation, although they could be the first moves. There is an urgent need to teach Public Health in its right perspective to medical students. Those who are in charge of teaching Public Health must have had ample field experience before they assume the role of teachers. The teachers of preventive medicine must be actively interested in the national health programmes and serve as consultants and advisers in Ministerial committees.

It has become fashionable to pay lip service to Public Health. At annual general meetings, at opening ceremonies and on many other special occasions important people rise up and sing the praises of Public Health. It is time that some of this talk is followed by some action!

The saying that "Prevention is better than cure" has become an oft repeated slogan that has lost its meaning. One can almost hear the young doctors saying, "Prevention might be better than cure; but curative medicine is certainly more interesting, and it is more paying than Public Health." There is an urgent need to change this impression and restore Public Health to its rightful place. This is a challenge that faces not only those in the Ministry of Health, but every member of the medical profession.

The best medicine is preventive medicine! Every dollar spent in promoting the health of the people is a dollar that has been wisely invested. The hospitals in our country are full of people who would not have gone there except for the lack of preventive medicine. If one goes around the hospitals and makes a list of those suffering from preventable diseases it is most revealing. At least 70 to 80% of the cases could have been prevented. Preventive medicine is cheaper than curative medicine. It is morally our responsibility to prevent those diseases that can be prevented.

Technical knowledge is available for this type of work. It only needs willing hands to do the job. In the interest of the nation's health, let us work towards this goal!
