EMPIRE RHEUMATISM COUNCIL

EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT

NOVEMBER, 1943, TO NOVEMBER, 1944

My Lords, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

You will cordially welcome the intimation from St. James's Palace that H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester wishes to continue as our President during his term of office as Governor-General of Australia. The letter stated: "Absence overseas will in no way diminish His Royal Highness's interest in the Council's work, which he is encouraged to know has been carried on, despite war-time difficulties, to a stage of hopeful promise."

Considerable attention has been given during the year by your War Emergency Committee to the matter of the post-war organization of our work. Up to August last hope was entertained that it would be possible to summon the Annual General Meeting in November, 1944, and to ask members to reconstitute the various Standing Committees, sessions of which were suspended in 1939. But at a meeting of the War Emergency Committee held on August 23rd it was unanimously decided that this was impracticable, and it was agreed that an Extraordinary General Meeting should be summoned as early in 1945 as the development of the war allowed. This decision was regretted, as our Emergency Executive Committee (though including representatives of all the chief standing committees and thus reflecting the general view of the Council) is sensible of the loss of the re-invigorating influence of meeting its constituents and learning by discussion their views as to the best conduct of our campaign. It was, however, unavoidable as well as regrettable. When next they meet, members will expect to have before them for discussion some definite programme for future organization.

It is clear that legislation already foreshadowed will set some fresh problems, but the nature of these cannot be exactly determined. In 1945 the position will be clearer for the Council to determine its future policy. It is in my mind that, additional to some minor changes in our routine of administration, it will be necessary to give full consideration to the problem of how tasks of research may be best co-ordinated in the new era which we are promised with the general provision of effective treatment of rheumatic sufferers.

Treatment

In the last Annual Report I chronicled the official pledge of the Government in post-war health policy "to ensure that all will receive the treatment

appropriate to their needs." There were some doubters who thought that this might be interpreted, in the spirit of the Lord Chancellor in *Iolanthe*, to mean "all, except that very large section of the community which has the misfortune to suffer from rheumatic disease." Perhaps in their minds was a memory of the original National Health Insurance Act, which purported to provide for the medical needs of the under-privileged sections of the community. The Act implicitly recognized that research into the causation and the most efficient form of treatment of rheumatism called for special measures other than those available to the general practitioner or the general hospital, since provision was made, for the approval by the Minister of Health, of institutions equipped to provide those special measures. But the number of institutions approved was trifling; it never reached double figures. Further, an approved society under the Act could pay for rheumatism treatment only if its finances were so prosperous that it had a surplus after meeting all other calls; then rheumatism treatment could be provided as an "additional benefit." The effect was that only those who were insured with a prosperous society and were within reach of one of the very few approved clinics could benefit—a very small percentage of the total. But we are assured that there is no justification for such cynical doubts; that the Ministry really intends to deal effectively with the treatment of rheumatic disease—on the whole the most serious enemy of health and industrial efficiency in our community.

The Minister of Health has set up a sub-committee of his Medical Advisory Committee to consider the whole position relative to rheumatism treatment and to report to him for his guidance. On this sub-committee the Empire Rheumatism Council is fully represented.

Post-Graduate Education

Consequent on the decision to extend the benefit of treatment to all rheumatic sufferers, it is to be expected that in the post-war period there will be a demand exceeding the supply at present available of medical practitioners with some special knowledge of rheumatic diseases. The Empire Rheumatism Council (*vide* Annual Report, 1942) recognized its responsibility to help to meet this need. Your War Emergency Committee during the past year has taken preliminary steps to that end, and, with the

greatly appreciated help of medical bodies having a special interest in the problems of rheumatism, has organized a Committee on Post-Graduate Education, of which Sir Adolphe Abrahams has very kindly consented to act as Chairman.

It has been made clear that the Empire Rheumatism Council has no intention of attempting to trespass on the field of other institutions. The task of ensuring that the medical profession as a whole is trained to deal effectively with the problems of rheumatic disease must be ultimately the responsibility of the medical teaching schools. Our part is to stimulate; to keep up the pressure of public opinion for action, and, to the extent that is necessary, to help temporary measures to meet emergency needs.

Research

The discovery of the great efficacy of preparations of the mould penicillin in dealing with certain infective conditions naturally led to inquiries as to whether it would prove valuable in the treatment of some forms of rheumatic disease. A limited test undertaken by Surgeon-Commander C. A. Green, of our Naval Research Foundation, gave no encouragement. Further tests will be made when greater supplies of penicillin are available. His present results are confirmed by tests in the United States.

A claim was published during the year in a reputable American publication (which has a British-printed edition) that a preparation containing massive doses of vitamin D had proved to be a cure for rheumatoid arthritis. The claim was supported by citation of what seemed to be weighty medical authority. We had a spate of inquiries from individuals, newspapers, and institutions, which were answered cautiously as we were confident that our allied body, the American Rheumatism Association, would have communicated to us promptly any definite discovery. We were on the point of asking them for confirmation when the claim was officially condemned and publication of it censured by the American Medical Association. Inquiry early in October to one of the chief American drug manufacturers elicited that the preparation was no longer available in this country.

To several hundreds of correspondents who wrote during the year regarding the Russian serum mentioned in our last Annual Report we have had to send the disappointing reply that an investigation (limited by the very small supply made available) did not justify recommendation of its use. In view of the high reputation of Soviet medical research, we propose, so soon as war conditions permit, to invite the Russian scientist responsible for the serum to visit this country or, alternatively, for the Council to send a research worker to Moscow to make further investigations. Members will agree that, whilst it is our duty to test any suggestion which offers hope, it is also our duty to take the utmost care that mistaken or unproven claims are not given sanction.

We look forward to great progress in the field of clinical research when the establishment of a national chain of treatment centres will enable comprehensive tests under full control conditions to be made for evaluating present means and proposed new means of treatment. The work of our Travelling Scholars, before the outbreak of the war, in studying the systems of the chief treatment centres of Europe and the United States was a valuable beginning. It showed that there was no lack of knowledge of modern methods in the British medical profession, but that, abroad as well as here, there was lack of what I shall call a determinative system, combining the highest degree of efficiency with reasonable regard for economy and for national habit. To institute such a system there is need, additional to diligent laboratory research, for exhaustive clinical research covering thousands of cases, accurately diagnosed and carefully observed.

Propaganda

Our Official Journal, *The Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*, will be published in future quarterly by the British Medical Association. We hope that this will lead to a wider interest in the *Annals* among the general body of the medical profession. The first number under the new arrangement was published in September. The Editorial Board remains as before, strengthened by the addition of the Editor of the *British Medical Journal*. There will be no departure from the close association in its publication with our colleagues of the American Rheumatism Association. I am confident that all members of the Council will wish to express their gratitude to the Editors of the Journal for their devoted work during the past five years. They have kept the flag flying during a time when it was extremely difficult for medical scientists to give close attention to the campaign against rheumatism. No other medical publication dealing specially with the problems of rheumatism has survived in Western Europe during the war.

Mention of the Journal leads me to express once more on behalf of the Council thanks to the medical and lay Press for the help they have continued to give to our work. This help, during a period when printing paper was more severely rationed than most other amenities of life, has remained consistently generous.

Opportunities for educational meetings have been scanty but all that were offered have been taken.

A Fourth Edition of "Rheumatism—A Plan for National Action" was published in October, previous editions, totalling 6,000 copies, having been exhausted.

Administration

Administrative work has been heavy during the year, our Council having been accepted by the public as a kind of unofficial mentor on rheumatism questions. Answering inquiries as to treatment care is taken to advise reference to the family doctor, and

to add what helpful information can be given. Frequent grateful letters from medical practitioners and from sufferers come as a reward. No trouble is spared in seeking out statistical and other information required, but a polite firmness is necessary when we are asked, for example, to study the measurements of the Pyramids in relation to rheumatic disease or to finance a research to prove that one certain type of apple will infallibly cure rheumatism. I am confident that all members will join me in expressing gratitude for the work of the War Emergency Committee—viz., Dr. C. W. Buckley, Dr. Hugh Burt, Lt.-Col. W. S. C. Copeman, A. G. Timbrell Fisher, Dr. Mervyn H. Gordon, Col. the Rt. Hon. Lord Gretton, Brig. F. D. Howitt, Sir Walter S. Kinnear, T. W. Robinson, and H. Gordon Thompson. Their responsibilities during the war years in acting for all the regular standing committees of the Council have been onerous. Next year should see the re-constitution of those Committees.

We shall soon now be emerging from the dust and din of battle after overcoming the grimmest threat

to mankind's well-being that history records. As the dawn of victory shows on the horizon, plans multiply to provide, as a reward for the sacrifices of the past, some secure hope for future well-being. To abolish the tragedy of vast mutual slaughter among the race of Man is certainly the first necessity. Additional to that, those plans give the highest promise of significant value which, in the field of social medicine, enlist the energies of peoples to combat the forces of killing and crippling disease. "Waste not, want not" is the basic law of economic advance, and there is no more cruel waste than permitting the wide incidence of avoidable illness. In that field of social medicine lies our task. The progress, achieved in the past difficult years gives me confidence that, if we maintain our energy, we may, within a reasonable term, see the happy end of our labours.

HORDER,
Chairman,

FRANK FOX,
Secretary.