

NATAL COASTAL BRANCH: HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT

In general this has been a quiet year. Several of the more controversial matters, having left Branch level, are now in the hands of Federal Council. The year has, however, seen a crescendo of petty difficulties in connection with professional fees, especially those pertaining to Medical Aid Society practice.

The widespread belief by the general public that there is a general tariff of fees governing medical practice is disturbing the relationship between the doctor and his patient. The majority of complaints reaching this office are based upon this misapprehension. The patient is not usually complaining of inadequate treatment, or extortionate fees, but is making a courteous enquiry as to whether or no the fee that he has been charged is the correct one. In most instances there is no further difficulty once the patient has been informed that this is a matter between himself and his doctor.

In contract practice this pleasant method of solving difficulties cannot be applied. Here the Society is acting as an agent attempting to provide medical attention at the lowest possible cost, and in doing so it often injures the doctor/patient relationship in a most unpleasant manner. The principle that no third party (whether he be a State bureaucrat, or sick-fund official) shall come between the doctor and his patient should now be strongly reaffirmed by our Association. The profession is being commercialized, not by the doctors, but by those who are attempting to buy medical attention wholesale and retail it to their customers whom they ingenuously label 'members of our Society'.

Office Bearers. At the Annual General Meeting of the Branch, the following office bearers and Council members were elected: *President*—Dr. E. W. S. Deale; *Vice-President*—Mr. L. Knox; *Hon. Treasurer*—Dr. P. A. Johnson; *Hon. Secretary*—Dr. N. R. Pooler; *Members of Council*—Drs. S. Disler, R. Mundy and F. Walt. Dr. Basil Sampson, the immediate past President, remained on the Council. The Federal Council members, previously elected, were Drs. A. Broomberg, E. W. S. Deale, H. Grant Whyte, N. A. Rossiter and Alan B. Taylor.

Ethical Committee. Happily there was no need for this Committee to be called together during the year.

Membership. At the present time the membership of the Branch is almost stationary, but it is approximately twice what it was 10 years ago.

Medical Congress, Durban, 1957. The Federal Council of the Association has accepted our invitation to hold the Medical Congress here in 1957. The suggested date is 16-20 September. It had been hoped that the Congress would be held in May or June, these being the most pleasant months of the year in Durban, but a number of factors made this impossible. It is not generally appreciated that since 1952 the office of 'President of Congress' no longer exists *per se*. The President of the Association for the year automatically holds this office. It is open to the Branch to forward to Federal Council the name of its members considered suitable for the office of President of the Association, thus ensuring that a local member shall in effect be President of Congress. This nomination need not necessarily be accepted by Federal Council.

An Organizing Committee has already met to establish firm foundations, on which to build what we all hope will be an outstanding Congress.

Medical School. The birth of clinical teaching at King Edward VIII Hospital has produced a crop of difficulties which may well affect the whole structure of the medical profession in the City of Durban. The creation of some 42 part-time teaching posts must be of great concern to the Branch. Your Council was invited to give evidence before the Committee established to investigate and report on this matter, but owing to lack of detailed information it felt unable to do so.

Clinical Meetings. A report by the Hon. Secretary of the Clinical Sub-Committee, Dr. Pauline Kienerman, is attached. The closest liaison must now be established between the Branch and the staff of the Medical School. The present organisation is no longer satisfactory. The School has many eminent visitors, thus providing a greatly increased number of potential lecturers. It has been suggested that the Medical School be given a large part in the organization of our clinical proceedings, and must be strongly represented on our Clinical Sub-Committee.

Library. In last year's report I described the Library as being in a state of suspended animation. It now lives again as part of the Library at the Medical School. In a very recent letter the University Librarian informed us that he has no doubt that this Library will afford the same splendid facilities as we now receive from the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand. A great amenity will be ours in the near future.

Association Honours. After 45 years' continuous membership, Dr. L. Erasmus Ellis has been elected an Honorary Life Member of the Medical Association of South Africa. There is no need to enlarge upon his distinguished career, and his great services to the profession. Dr. Duncan MacKenzie was invited to the annual dinner as an honoured guest, but unfortunately owing to ill-health he was unable to accept. His valuable services to this Branch have been minuted in our proceedings.

Social Functions. Early in the year a combined dinner was held with the Legal Association, and it was at this dinner that the British High Commissioner, Sir Percivale Liesching, made a considered statement on British Commonwealth relations. Our usual *Annual Dinner* was held in October, this time at the Marine Hotel. We had the pleasure of entertaining Dr. J. J. du Pre le Roux, Secretary for Health, Dr. G. M. Candau, Director-General of WHO, and Dr. F. J. C. Cambournac, WHO Regional Director for Africa. Both these dinners were well attended and greatly enjoyed. I look forward to the day when 200 or 300 members of the Branch find time to meet their colleagues in at least one function of the year. A new departure is the Branch's venture into the world of sport. Challenged by the Institute of Architects, we found teams for golf, bowls and cricket.

Alleged Invasion into Private Practice. Representatives of the Medical Association have met the Medical Council on the matter of 'farming out' and similar problems. Private practice has certain

unalienable rights and I hope that they will be protected as a result of these negotiations.

Poliomyelitis Vaccine. Your Branch Council noted with dismay the lack of liaison between those responsible for the distribution of the vaccine, and local practitioners. It is hoped that our urgent representations will bear fruit in 1956.

Schedule of Customary Fees. For 2 years a Sub-Committee has been collecting evidence on this matter. Schedules were provided by most of the Groups, and these were forwarded to Federal Council. Our surgical colleagues, however, decided not to forward such a schedule and passed the following resolution: 'This Meeting declines to lay down a schedule of fees, and requests the Natal Coastal Branch to convey this resolution to the Federal Council.' This was done.

Benevolent Fund. The amount raised each year by this Branch to help the Benevolent Fund bears no relationship to its increasing membership. There was, however, a reasonable response to the appeal sent out by the Vice-President of the Branch at Christmas; just over £200 has been received.

Bursary Fund. This Fund exists to assist in the education of the children of ex-Service Medical Officers. No applications for bursaries were received this year.

Contract Practice. The Contract Practice Sub-Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Broomberg, met frequently during the year, and has been over-burdened with work. Only those who serve on it can realize how unsatisfactory the situation has become.

Organization. I am grateful for the help I have received from the Secretaries and Conveners of the various Sub-Committees. It is due to them that the Branch Council has been able to occupy itself with broad policy, rather than detailed routine matters. I have also been greatly helped by the local groups, especially by the Paediatricians, Physicians, and Surgeons. It is essential to establish some form of organization to keep the Branch Council correctly informed of what is happening in medical circles in this area. All those who negotiate with outside bodies on behalf of any part of the medical profession should keep the Association fully informed of what is happening. It is only by such collegiality that true strength can be obtained.

Thanks. During the year the Hon. Treasurer, Dr. P. A. Johnson temporarily left South Africa. Dr. F. Walt was appointed Acting Treasurer in his place. The Branch has to thank Dr. Johnson for

many successful negotiations conducted in the sphere of contract practice during the last 2 years.

Once again I must express my thanks to Mrs. Brinkworth for her graceful criticisms and constant encouragement.

Deaths. During the year the Branch suffered the loss of a great personality, Dr. D. J. Malan. He was a doctor fashioned in the classic mould. We also mourn the passing of Dr. J. Maurice Hulett, Dr. A. Sanders, Dr. N. C. O'Byrne, and Dr. H. Cameron Pain.

N. R. Pooler
Hon. Secretary

31 January 1956.

CLINICAL SUB-COMMITTEE: HON. SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Clinical Sub-Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. H. Grant Whyte, held one committee meeting, in February 1955, at which a tentative programme was arranged for the year.

From February until August 9 meetings were held of which 5 consisted of lectures by visiting personnel to Durban, and 4 meetings were of local colour arranged by the Clinical Sub-Committee.

Many of the proposed clinical meetings were unacceptable to the hospitals, owing to postgraduate courses held at the Medical School attached to King Edward VIII Hospital and at Addington Hospital. From August the meetings were arranged under the auspices of the Medical School, the Orthopaedic Group, and the Radiological Group. Several overseas lecturers who presented lectures at the Pretoria Medical Congress were invited by the various Groups to come to Durban. During the course of the year meetings were held under auspices of the following: (1) Department of Medicine, Medical School, (2) Springfield Hospital, (3) Addington Hospital, (4) Radiologists, King Edward VIII Hospital, and (5) Department of Pathology, Medical School.

As a result of these sectional meetings our attendances probably dropped considerably. The time has arrived for us as an Association to assess whether Branch meetings fulfil a useful function in view of the many activities mentioned above, or whether we should become integrated with the Medical School or coordinate with them in our arrangements.

I must record sincere thanks to Mrs. Brinkworth.

Pauline Klenerman
Hon. Secretary