

## EDITORIAL

**WOMEN'S INSTITUTES AND HEALTH SERVICES:** In this issue we have an outline of the brief presented by the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada to the Royal Commission on National Health Services. It is a sound, concise, comprehensive statement asking for more hospitals, homes and rehabilitation centres for the chronically ill; more out-patient clinics to avoid the unnecessary use of hospital beds and to encourage early diagnosis; an extension of visiting homemaker service to assist where the mother of a family is stricken with illness; visiting nurses to give special care or treatment to patients who can be cared for in their homes, thus freeing hospital beds for those requiring hospital care; and "comprehensive medical and surgical insurance at a price people can afford to pay."

The Women's Institutes have a record of health service in their own right which justifies their presentation of a brief to the Royal Commission. To guard the health of children was the chief reason for the organization of Women's Institutes in the first place. A talk by a medical doctor on "The Care and Feeding of Children" is one of the first program features recorded in the minutes of the Mother Institute at Stoney Creek and health lectures by doctors and nurses have been popular ever since. The Institutes pioneered Medical Inspection in the rural schools of Ontario. They work with their county health units to provide baby clinics and immunization for children against diphtheria and scarlet fever and whooping cough and polio. They have been instrumental in bringing travelling dental clinics to isolated areas and in providing ambulance transportation to take emergency cases to hospital. Where they have local hospitals they help with furnishings, sewing and other services. Perhaps their newest project is to work with other local groups in the rehabilitation of patients in mental hospitals.

It seems rather typical of the Women's Institute that the brief concludes with a promise "to co-operate in whatever plans may be adopted to improve and safeguard the health of the Canadian people."

No doubt there will be scope for all of us to co-operate in any new plan of health service that may be introduced. There will be need of education to teach people how to use a service so that it may be of the greatest benefit to everyone. As preventive medicine comes into more general practice, local bodies such as the Institutes may serve as avenues for health education. Because an over-all plan of health service cannot be put into effect overnight, there will still be areas in urgent need of health service and local Institutes may be able to help here as some of them are already doing.

In a survey made by a Church preparing a brief for the Royal Commission, it was discovered that in an isolated section of Ontario there has never been any immunization against communicable diseases, not even vaccination to prevent small-pox. What *could* happen here is almost too horrible to contemplate. There is no dental service in the area. At long intervals a railway dental coach has made stops along the line but the last visit was over two years ago. Again it is not hard to imagine what the neglect must be doing to children's teeth and what both children and adults may be suffering from toothache and infection. If there were a Women's Institute in the area it might stir up the whole community in a determined crusade to bring in dental and immunization clinics. (Or could it be possible there *are* Institutes in communities in need of these services?)

The survey showed, too, in one place after another across Canada, that a common cause of illness in children is malnutrition, due not to poverty so much as to their mother's ignorance of how to feed children. Certainly an Institute could help with this problem if it could get the mothers into its membership.

So it would seem that the Women's Institutes' concern about health may never be more needed than it is right now. Our national organization did well to promise "co-operation in whatever plans may be adopted to improve and safeguard the health of the Canadian people."

*Ethel Chapman*