

Dental Service in Rural Communities

AT THE workshop conference on "Dental Health Services to the Public in Rural Ontario Communities," organized by the Ontario Dental Public Health Council and held in Toronto in November, the Ontario Minister of Health, Hon. Matthew Dymond expressed his concern over the maldistribution of dentists over the province, dentists, like doctors tending to congregate in the cities, leaving the rural areas with very inadequate service.

The Minister said that a few years ago a movement was started to try to recruit young dentists to go into areas where they were most needed. In its last session the Government granted bursaries to ten students to induce them to serve in rural communities. Another plan under consideration is to establish a new Dental College and the Minister would like to have it located outside Toronto, in the hope of attracting more students from rural backgrounds.

"There is now a great sense of urgency about health problems," Mr. Dymond said. "If we cannot get the service the people need through the profession we will have to look for it elsewhere."

Dr. S. A. MacGregor, Chief of Dental Services at the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children and Professor on the Faculty of Dentistry, Toronto University, with a wide experience in public health work across the Dominion, spoke on "Rural Ontario and Its Health Problems." Dr. MacGregor expressed his "alarm" at the way young dentists are crowding into the cities. From a questionnaire submitted to a graduating class he quoted these reasons for avoiding practising in a town of 5,000 or less: "I can make more money in the city." "People in outlying areas have little appreciation of preventive dentistry. They tell you what they want done rather than accept a complete examination." "I am told it is hard to get country people to make appointments." "I was brought up in the city and my home and friends are here." "I want to specialize." "I can't get suitable accommodation in a rural area."

With the hope that a dentist who had grown up in the country might be more likely to practice in the country, the Ontario Dental Association does considerable recruiting in rural high schools. Unfortunately too many students who would like to go to university to study dentistry fail in their matriculation exams and this led to the question of why so many fail in Grade XIII. (This was discussed at some length in the Workshops later in the day.) Dr. MacGregor quoted from an

editorial in the West Lorne Sun: "As the select few who got into university with 60 or 65% average are hard at work, what about the others who had their eyes set on higher education but who failed to reach the required university entrance percentage? Even though their percentage may have been 59.9%, their education most likely is ended. Are the Universities, the Governments and others sacrificing the future of these young people needlessly?"

The speaker asked if this yardstick gives a true indication of the student's ability and reminded us that such great men as Banting and Osler were not brilliant students by school standards. At the same time it was suggested that teaching standards in both rural and secondary schools might well be examined; that the rate of teachers' salaries and the lack of academic specialists in rural areas might be partly responsible for Grade XIII results. To provide Junior Colleges for students past Grade XII might help. Anyway it is very important for the rural community that rural young people be trained in the professions so that we can have more dentists, doctors, teachers, clergymen coming back to serve in rural areas.

The speaker introduced the problem of the high cost of university education, especially for students who must live away from home, and the high cost of setting up in dental or medical practice. And Dr. M. E. Jarrett of Wellington County Health Unit explained the Fergus Student's Aid Association. A fund of \$5,000 was established as a beginning and this is being added to. A student in need of funds may have a loan free of interest and he need not start to repay it until after he has graduated and worked for five years.

The conference members were divided into workshops to consider problems of education in and appreciation of dental care, the socio-economic problems of the dentist in a rural community, physical accommodation, providing dental services for handicapped patients, and of course the overall problem of getting a sufficient number of dentists for rural areas. Some of the recommendations were:

Education should be reinforced in rural communities by full-time public health services and the professional societies. Dental associations should provide factual material for press, radio, television and films. Greater emphasis should be put on vocational guidance in rural schools to interest students in dentistry as well as other professions, with emphasis on service in rural areas. One group felt that Grade XIII taken alone is not the best index of a