

REPORT.

The INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF HOSPITALS AND CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS to the Hon. G. FOWLDS,
Minister for Hospitals and Charitable Aid.

SIR,—

18th June, 1908.

In response to expressed wish of the Counties Conference, held in June of last year, the proposed Hospitals and Charitable Aid Bill was circulated among the authorities concerned, and a Conference of delegates from Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards and separate institutions was held in Wellington, commencing 9th June, 1908.

Some 100 delegates attended the Conference, which lasted three days. During this period the main principles of the Bill were discussed, and the 212 remits bearing on those principles were dealt with as opportunity arose.

In addition the Conference made certain very valuable suggestions and recommendations on hospital and charitable-aid matters, which will no doubt be fully considered by the Government before the new Hospitals Bill is brought down.

Never before in the history of the Dominion has so important a Conference been held regarding the system governing our hospitals and charitable aid. The attending delegates were prominent men in the districts from whence they came, as may be seen from the fact that there were 2 members and 3 ex-members of Parliament; 4 mayors; 10 ex-mayors; 8 chairmen of County Councils; 26 chairmen and 3 ex-chairmen of Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards; and 12 chairmen and 2 ex-chairmen of separate institutions. In every sense of the word, therefore, it can be claimed that the Conference was a thoroughly representative one.

It says much for the public spirit and patriotism of these gentlemen that they attended, in many instances at considerable personal inconvenience, a Conference concerning questions which have so important a bearing not only on the treatment to be meted out to the sick and indigent poor, but also on the future history of the people of the Dominion.

Large Districts.—As regards the main principles of the Bill, it was only to be expected that there would be considerable opposition to the proposal to divide the Dominion into larger hospital districts. Many of the smaller hospital districts naturally object, on more or less reasonable grounds, to being merged into one large district. Nevertheless everything goes to show that efficiency and economy of administration are more likely to be effected by large than by small districts especially in conjunction with a system of appointing committees, as agreed upon by the Conference.

Of the twenty hospital districts set forth in the First Schedule of the Bill, the following eight were agreed to by the delegates present: North Auckland, Auckland, Waikato, Hawke's Bay, Palmerston North, Nelson, South Canterbury, Waitaki. The objections of the remaining districts concerned are being carefully gone into, as it was obvious to the Conference that the question could not be decided by a general vote. Those objecting to the amalgamation of their districts have been, or will be, met and conferred with; and in more than one instance it is probable that satisfactory arrangements can be made to meet the objections. In other instances, however, strong local feeling has to be contended with; and very careful consideration will be required as to what in such cases will be the best course to pursue not only in the interests of the district, but also in the interests of the Dominion as a whole.

Mode of Election.—The decision of the Conference with regard to the mode of election was not a matter for surprise. To many, doubtless, the present system of election seems all that can be desired, and in many districts it may have worked well; nevertheless there is a strong feeling throughout the country that the Boards should be elected by those entitled to vote at local bodies' elections, and this feeling cannot be altogether ignored.

Hospitals and Charitable Relief under One Control.—The practically unanimous opinion that hospital and charitable-aid matters should be under the control of one Board was eminently satisfactory, and will undoubtedly make for an economical and easy administration.

Continuity of Office.—The need for Boards to have a longer continuity of office was also unanimously recognised by the Conference, which was also emphatic in its opinion that the position of Chairman should be an honorary one. The country is to be congratulated on having available a number of experienced men who are eager to devote gratuitously a great part of their time to onerous work which does not always bring about that appreciation which is often richly deserved.

Election of Committees.—The decision with regard to the election of Committees is an admirable one, and the power that may be given Boards to appoint Committees, "not necessarily of its own members," will render available for our institutions the services of many desirable persons who under the present order of things are reluctant to come forward.

Separate Institutions.—"That the system of separate institutions, as at present in force, is approved by this Conference, and should be continued in cases where the majority of contributory local authorities desire it."

It is not surprising that the above was carried. If the text of this resolution becomes law separate institutions in some measure will be subject to the influence of the contributory authorities who find the greater portion of the expenditure. In effect the existence of a separate institution will very properly depend upon the contributory local bodies of the district, who find