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ANTE-NATAL CARE IS WORTH WHILE

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene, Health Department)

WHAT is ante-natal care? Systematic medical oversight throughout the period of pregnancy, that is all. Every doctor engaging in the practice of midwifery should arrange to examine his patients in an early stage of their pregnancy, and to see them thereafter at suitable intervals until delivery takes place. It is rounded off by a final examination within a few weeks after confinement, to see that all is well. This ante-natal work is free to every pregnant woman, being provided for in the Maternity Benefits section of the Social Security Act. The ante-natal supervision specified covers treatment and advice in connection with the pregnancy and any conditions arising from and aggravated by pregnancy.

Quite a lot of work is involved in ante-natal care. The best routine is monthly visits to the doctor from the third month of pregnancy until the seventh month, thereafter fortnightly visits unless the doctor makes more frequent appointments. The minimum

number of visits should never be less than five. Sometimes, when the doctor wants to do the work, the mother's can't be bothered to keep the appointments. Sometimes the doctor, after accepting the case, fails to make the necessary appointments. A proportion of mothers and doctors are being careless about ante-natal care. If a mother can't get this care from her doctor, she can from ante-natal clinics in towns, or from district midwives or district nurses in rural areas.

Reducing Anxiety And Trouble

No mother should miss ante-natal care. It takes away anxiety and dread. Much discomfort is removed, and sometimes actual suffering reduced and avoided. Early treatment may cure or control the toxæmias of pregnancy so that a living child results in spite of such mishaps. Abnormal labours and instrumental deliveries are reduced, and are arranged for in suitable hospital conditions. Ante-natal care certainly means an increase in normal labours, and surely that is what every mother wants. When there is trouble at delivery time, there are always more still-births. The result of forethought, is more live babies, and surely this is what the State wants. So no mother, as far as the State is concerned, is expected to miss ante-natal care.

In practice, however, many mothers are not receiving the ante-natal care they should. The doctor who doesn't give the time and care to this work is failing both mother and country. The doctor who does, is proving his devotion to the mother's welfare, and to the national interest, too. The mother who is offered and neglects ante-natal care is a saboteur, risking her own and her child's health, and the State's birth-rate, already far too low. More babies live, more mothers live, with adequate ante-natal care.

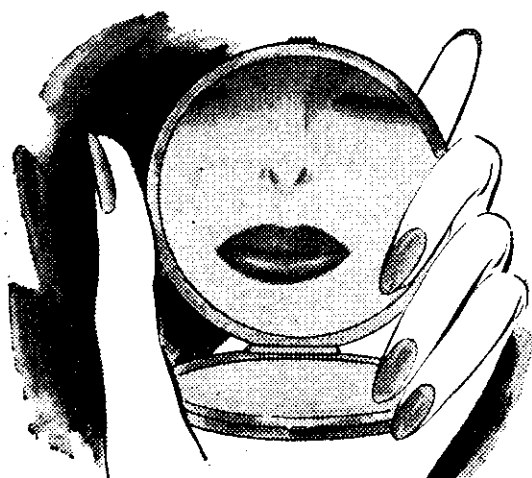
Danger Signals

As a good many mothers are not going through this routine precaution, the danger signals in pregnancy should be kept in mind. Persistent constipation; vomiting, severe indigestion, or pain after food; headaches; any change in eyesight; swelling of the feet, hands, or face; diminished urine passed during the 24 hours; any loss of blood; giddiness—if any of these things happen during pregnancy, immediate medical advice is necessary.

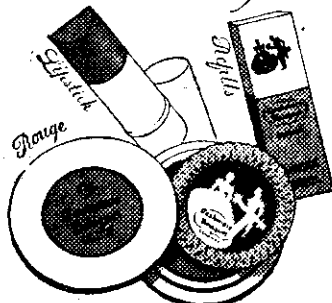
Ante-natal care is a new development in medicine. It dates from 1900, but it has proved its worth. It's a very foolish mother who misses this supervision nowadays.

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