

NEW ZEALAND'S HEALTH

in wartime

A KORERO REPORT

A high tribute to the progressive way in which New Zealand dealt with its health problems was paid by Dr. Edith Summerskill, a member of the recent Parliamentary delegation from the United Kingdom, in a radio talk.

"From what I have seen in New Zealand, there can be no doubt that your standard of medicine and surgery are high and your hospitals are very well run," said Dr. Summerskill. She has been most favourably impressed with her visit to the Otago Medical School and to note that the approach to disease was from the right angle—that of prevention. The training was very thorough and this was no doubt a vital factor in the low mortality rate. She had also been impressed with the conduct of confinement in hospital and to learn at the Queen Margaret Hospital that every woman in childbirth was given an anaesthetic irrespective of whether the case was normal or abnormal. "This is twentieth century approach to midwifery indeed," she said.

Dr. Summerskill described New Zealand's dental nursing service as "unique." Dental hygiene was of primary importance, but no other country possessed the services of nurses trained in fillings and extractions.—A newspaper report.

THROUGH FIVE years of war, conditions have arisen which might menace New Zealand health seriously. Thousands of people have moved to the cities for war-production work, often to live in cramped and difficult conditions. Homes have been broken up as their menfolk have left for the Armed Forces. Hundreds of women and older persons not used to factory work have for the first time entered industry to work at high pressure—many in night shifts and with overtime hours. Rationing has been introduced. There have been shortages of some types of food, shortages of fuel for cooking and for heating. Doctors have

left their practices in large numbers for war service, leaving often only a skeleton group to carry on medical duties which the war has made more exacting than ever. For many people there is the constant emotional strain of war. How, in such difficult conditions, has our national health been keeping? The answer appears to be surprisingly good. A study of vital statistics and medical reports shows a position that at least is satisfactory. If there has been deterioration in some directions, there has also been improvement in others.

You have to be careful if you start looking at vital statistics. They can get you into trouble. For instance, with the discovery over the years of powerful curative drugs, increased medical knowledge, and improved methods of treatment, you imagine that people's chances of living longer, their lives freer from disease, are better. To substantiate your ideas you study the vital statistics of New Zealand. With surprise you find the death-rate has been increasing for more than ten years. The explanation is not that the population is becoming less healthy, but that it is growing older. Immigration of people in early adult age has kept New Zealand's death-rate perhaps the lowest in the world. Now these immigrants are passing into the older age groups. The death-rate, therefore, is increasing, and will continue to increase for many years. Also contributing since the war to the increased death-rate is the absence from New Zealand of many thousands of the healthiest young men. There is no need for worry—your chances of living to a greater age than your grandmother are improving with the passing of every day.

After the last war the worst influenza pandemic (universal epidemic) of all time caused more deaths in many countries than the war itself. There were thousands more cases than hospital