

Note: Total Attendees at Dental Hospital (1948) :- 81,765

10-2-15

MEMORANDUM PRESENTED BY J.C. MIDDLETON SHAW TO THE
COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY INTO THE TRAINING OF MEDICAL
STUDENTS AND RELATED MATTERS.

Summarized
in following
pages.

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1. At the present time there is only one dental school in our country, the Dental School of the University of the Witwatersrand. It was designed to graduate only 18 dentists per annum. The School building has been expropriated by the S. A. Railways. No one knows when a new building will be erected. Until recently there were good reasons for believing that a new building would be erected before 1950. The proposed new building was to have been designed to provide facilities for graduating 50 dentists per annum. It is improbable now that any new building can be erected by 1950. There is reason to fear that when a building is erected it will provide facilities for graduating only 15 dentists per annum.

There are 854 dentists in the Union. The Committee on the "Provision of Additional Facilities for the Training of Dentists in the Union" stated that the absolute minimum number of dentists required to meet the demands of our people is 1,800, and that to meet their real needs at least 11,000 dentists are required. The same Committee said that while the existing position in connection with the number of dentists available is bad, the future outlook is "really alarming". The following are statements on the subject by a number of responsible organisations and by two recent Ministers of Education: -

The Union Education Departmental Committee on "The Provision of Additional Facilities for the Training of Dentists in the Union" (1946) said : -

"The future outlook, however, is alarming. This is due almost entirely to the fact that the dental profession of to-day is hopelessly out of balance in its age distribution. It has been estimated that over half of the existing number of active dentists (say 350) will have ceased to be engaged in practice in from 10 - 15 years from now. To maintain the status quo (and allowing for increase in population) it is estimated that 500 new entrants to the profession are essential during the next 10 years, i.e. *50 new entrants per annum. It must be stressed, however, that this figure is based on the existing demand for dental treatment. If the demand rises in the future to anywhere near equality with the real need for treatment, then 50 additional entrants per annum would be totally inadequate to meet the demand".

*Note: When the above was written, three years ago, there were 801 dentists on the Register. At the end of 1948 the corresponding figure was 854, i.e. an increase of 53 for the three years instead of the minimum increase of 50 per annum or 150 for the three years which was considered necessary by the Committee on Dental Training.

The National Health Council (1948) said : -

"This Council draws attention to the alarming shortage of European and non-European dentists in the

Union/.....

Union, and stresses the need for the integration to any national health service of an adequate dental service. Further, this Council having noted the recommendations of the Committee on the "Question of the Provision of Additional Facilities for the Training of Dentists in the Union of South Africa", recommends that the necessary steps be taken at the earliest possible opportunity to increase training facilities for dentists of all races".

The South African Medical and Dental Council's Education Committee (1949) said : -

"In view of the comparatively small number of dental practitioners and especially in view of the age composition of the dental profession in the Union, any diminution in the number of entrants to the study of dentistry is to be regarded with alarm".

The late Minister of Education (in March, 1947) said that he approved the number of dentists graduating in the Dental School of the University of the Witwatersrand being increased permanently from 18 to 50.

The present Minister of Education (in July, 1948) said : -

"With regard to the Dental Hospital (of the University of the Witwatersrand), I am fully aware of the urgency of this essential service. The financial arrangements requested by the institution have already been approved and if it becomes necessary I shall again intervene..... to speed up the erection of the building".

2. For close on 25 years I have been intimately associated with South African dental education and with South African dental health matters. In addition to holding the offices of Dean and Director of the University of the Witwatersrand Dental School and Hospital, I am a member of the principle organisations which are concerned with South African dentistry, namely, the South African Medical and Dental Council, the National Health Council, the Medical Committee of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Dental Association of South Africa, and the Odontological Society of South Africa. I was a member of the Department of Education Committee on the training of dentists in the Union. I am, therefore, well acquainted with dentistry in South Africa. I may add that I have also a good and up to date knowledge of dentistry in other countries.

I wish to place before the Commission the following opinions : -

1. Unless almost immediate steps are taken to help the University of the Witwatersrand out of the difficulty in which it has been placed by the expropriation by the Railways of its dental hospital building, the pioneering work in dental fields which that University has performed over the past 25 years will be gravely and probably irreparably damaged.
2. Unless almost immediate steps are taken to establish in South Africa facilities for graduating at least 50 dentists per annum, within the next ten years there will be such a

shortage/.....

shortage of dentists that the health of our people will be most gravely effected. Each year in the future the number of dentists per head of the population is going to decrease markedly.

3. At the present time there is a serious shortage of dentists in our country. The poorer white people of the country are not receiving anything approaching the dental treatment they are seeking and require. At least 99% of the non-European people are receiving no dental treatment at all, other than extraction of their teeth - and that is not real "treatment".
4. Over 600 new admissions to the dental register are necessary to maintain the status quo in the dental profession. Already the time is past when any action which can be taken now will give us as many dentists in the country 10 years hence as there are to-day.
5. While it is of prime importance to expand the existing facilities for dental education at the University of the Witwatersrand, it is now most desirable to establish also at least one more dental school. It is possible to erect a building in a relatively short period of time. But it takes very many years to establish and develop a dental hospital, to secure or to train a teaching staff which knows its job and to attract the large number of patients which a teaching dental hospital requires for clinical training of students. It is not possible to establish a new dental school which will graduate dentists in any period short of 8 - 10 years from now. ~~the date of erection of suitable buildings.~~ From personal knowledge I can say that it is these facts, coupled with the immense expense of establishing a new school, which prompted the Committee on Dental Training to place foremost in its recommendations the urgent necessity of expanding the facilities for dental education already available at the University of the Witwatersrand.
6. The present position in connection with all aspects of South African dentistry - dental education, dental health and dental research - is no credit to our country and is a cause of constant regret and concern to everyone who has at heart the best interests of the health of our people.

I have shown already that nothing worth while has materialised as a result of the recommendations of the Committee appointed by the last Government to consider the entire subject of the shortage of dentists in the Union, nor as a result of the resolutions of the National Health Council and the Medical Council and of statements on the subject by two Ministers. It would, therefore, be unreasonable to expect that the Commission of Enquiry into the Training of Medical Students can do much about the matter. Nevertheless I hope the Commission will find itself able to assist by exposing the unsatisfactory facilities which exist and have always existed in our country in connection with dental education and will add its voice to the many voices which have already spoken concerning the way in which the dental needs of the people have been neglected in the past and are going to be neglected in the future. I recognise, of course, that at the moment the Commission may find itself ill designed to give the subject the attention it requires and deserves. I wish, therefore, to say that I associate myself with the Medical and

Dental Council's protest to the Department of Education concerning the absence of a dentist on the Commission. I am sure that the meaningless questionnaire which has been sent out in connection with dental education is explained by the absence on the Commission of dental help and guidance. No doubt, however, the Commission has itself brought to the notice of the Minister the way in which it is handicapped and has already recommended that its personnel be increased by the appointment of a number of dentists. The absence of dentists on the Commission is but another example of the lack of attention which is so regularly given to dental needs and requirements.

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