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# THE CAPE CO-ORDINATING COUNCIL of SOCIAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS CAPE TOWN

REPORT SERIES : No. 6

DECEMBER, 1943

## REPORT OF SUB-COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO COLLECT INFORMATION ON THE NEED OF A HOME FOR EPILEPTICS

The members of the sub-committee appointed by the Council were Dr. G. J. Key, Col. W. H. Quirk, Major G. A. Reid, Mrs. Z. Steyn and Dr. T. Shadick Higgins (convener). Dr. E. M. Broome, Dr. R. A. Forster and Mrs. J. A. Kriel were co-opted by the sub-committee.

Dr. Key supplied the sub-committee with a copy of the report of 17th April, 1939, by the Interdepartmental Committee on Epileptics, consisting of Dr. L. van Schalkwyk and Dr. W. Russell. A summary of this was prepared and circulated to members of the sub-committee; and a copy of the summary is appended hereto.

From this report it is concluded that the epileptics in South Africa are not less than 1 per 500 population. If this figure is applicable to all races, the epileptics in the Union (1936 census) should amount to not less than 4,000 Europeans, 2,000 Coloured and Asiatics, and 13,000 Natives. In the Cape Peninsula the number of epileptics, on the same basis, would be about 800, half European and half non-European.

It is evident from the above-mentioned report that the Union Government Departments have the needs of epileptics under consideration so far as Europeans are concerned, but no reference is made therein to non-Europeans.

### CHILD EPILEPTICS

Dealing with child epileptics, the report distinguishes between (1) those who are fit to attend ordinary schools, (2) those who are educable, but, owing to mental defect or other reasons, can only be taught satisfactorily at a special school like the Jan Kriel School for epileptics at Kuils River, C.P., and (3) feeble-minded cases of such low grade that they should be received into institutions for the feeble-minded.

*Special schools.* The interdepartmental committee concludes that for the present the needs of the second group of child epileptics referred to above can be met by the expansion and development of the Jan Kriel School, Kuils River, which is a residential school for European epileptic children. It reports that the committee of the school will, with help received from the Union Education Department, be in a position to provide the necessary facilities. No recommendation is made in the report for any corresponding provision for non-European children, for whom at present there are no facilities whatever.

*Certifiable cases.* As regards the third group, it is stated by the interdepartmental committee that the accommodation for European certifiable epileptic children in institutions for the feeble-minded is insufficient, and that this applies at both the Alexandra and Witbank institutions. This statement is followed by a recommendation that adequate accommodation should be made for defective epileptic children in institutions for the feeble-minded, but non-European children are not mentioned.

The provision for non-European certifiable epileptic children, we are informed, is even more inadequate than that for Europeans. At the Cape there is no special institution for feeble-minded non-European children corresponding to the Alexandra for Europeans. The only accommodation available for them is the general mental hospital (Valkenberg).

### ADULT EPILEPTICS

The report of the interdepartmental committee similarly classifies adult epileptics into (a) sane and (b) mentally disordered or defective (i.e., certifiable).

"Sane" group. The report gives 3,000 as the approximate number of Europeans in this group, including also such cases as are mentally disordered or defective but not in need of institutional custodial care. It expresses the opinion that a proportion of this "sane" group, estimated at 350, needs special care in "colonies". At Craighall, near Johannesburg, the Rand Epileptic Employment Association maintains a colony or employment centre to assist European male epileptics who cannot get employment in the open labour market. The interdepartmental committee recommends that with the help of Government grants this institution should be extended to serve the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and that similar institutions should be established in the other provinces. For the Cape Province it is proposed that this development should be undertaken by the committee of the Jan Kriel School, Kuils River. No recommendation is made concerning any corresponding provision for non-Europeans.

We are of the opinion that institutional assistance is also required for certain classes of non-certifiable female epileptics, both European and non-European. These include mothers who on account of their liability to fits ought not to be alone in charge of their children. The special needs of female epileptics are part of the wider question of the lack of facilities for dealing with female "problem cases". This wider question is outside our terms of reference, but we feel it is desirable to call attention to it. The want is greatest amongst Coloured females, especially adolescents and young adults, for whom, for instance, there is no accommodation corresponding to that provided for males at Tokai Reformatory, where there are 350 Coloured boys and youths, mostly delinquent and problem cases.

*Certifiable group.* The interdepartmental committee refer to the fact that there are about a thousand epileptics in mental institutions in the Union, constituting approximately 18 per cent. of all the inmates. It remarks that the question of accommodation for certifiable adult epileptics resolves itself into the question of accommodation at mental institutions generally, and emphasizes that there is a serious insufficiency, which therefore affects the accommodation for epileptics.

#### CONCLUSIONS

We have to submit the following conclusions :

- (1) The recommendations of the Interdepartmental Committee on epileptics cover much of the ground that we were appointed to consider, and in general we favour the recommendations made in the report of that Committee dated 17th April, 1939 : and also the recommendations made elsewhere concerning the need for greater accommodation at mental institutions, including accommodation for certifiable epileptics.
- (2) We are also of opinion that the provision proposed for Europeans in the above-mentioned report should be extended to non-Europeans, particularly, in the Cape Peninsula, the Cape Coloured.
- (3) The proposed colonies for epileptics should not be confined to males, because there is a need for similar accommodation for females.
- (4) Some of the problems presented by female epileptics, both certifiable and non-certifiable, form part of the wider problem of uncontrollable girls. Although, therefore, the wider question is outside our terms of reference we feel it desirable to urge the need for institutional accommodation for delinquents and problem cases amongst Coloured girls and women.
- (5) The proposed institution for epileptics would afford opportunities for research into the problem of epilepsy and we consider it desirable that funds should be made available for such research.

(Signed) E. M. BROOME.  
R. A. FORSTER.  
G. J. KEY.  
J. A. KRIEL.  
W. H. QUIRK.  
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T. SHADICK HIGGINS, convener

CAPE TOWN,  
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