

## NOTIFICATION OF LEPROSY

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On June 22nd, 1951, the Public Health (Leprosy) Regulations came into operation. These regulations, a copy of which every practitioner will receive in due course, provide for the notification of leprosy. Henceforth every practitioner attending on, or called in to visit a patient suffering from leprosy in any building used for human habitation shall, as soon as he becomes aware that the person is so suffering, or if he is aware at the date of the coming into operation of these regulations, send to the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health a certificate in the form set out in the schedule of regulations.

It should be clearly understood that this special provision for notification direct to the Ministry is considered advisable for the following reasons:—

1. It enables strict secrecy to be maintained, and provides means whereby any additional suffering on the part of the patient and his friends can be prevented, because in the past the whole family of the patient has sometimes been affected by the local disclosure of knowledge of the patient's condition.
2. If the full benefit of all recent advances is to be brought to the patient, accurate knowledge of the location of cases of leprosy is essential.

It should be very clearly stated that there are within the regulations no statutory powers of any kind whereby a patient suffering from leprosy can be removed to a hospital. It is considered that any such powers are undesirable, for this would lead to concealment of the disease and defeat the purpose of these regulations, viz. to bring to the patient suffering from leprosy the maximum aid possible of all the services of the State.

The number of cases of leprosy coming to notice in this country is quite small, and almost without exception they have been infected abroad. A considerable proportion of the patients are foreigners and colonial subjects. Generally it has been possible to arrange for repatriation of these patients to the country of their

origin, but since the war some cases have arisen in which repatriation was impossible owing to the fact that the patient was either a British subject or a national of a country to which, for various reasons return was impracticable.

Certain non-infectious patients are known to be receiving treatment under private arrangements, others are being treated as out-patients at hospitals, or admitted temporarily to infectious diseases hospitals, or to a small but very valuable private hospital restricted to British nationals. It must be admitted that in the past arrangements for the treatment of infectious cases sometimes presented great difficulty, but this will now be relieved by steps which are announced in a letter from Sir John Charles, the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, to all medical officers of health. Firstly, there is the appointment of an Adviser in Leprosy, Dr. Robert G. Cochrane, The British Empire Leprosy Relief Association, 167 Victoria Street, London, S.W.1. This officer is now available to any doctor who may need advice on the diagnosis and treatment of leprosy. He will associate himself with practitioners notifying cases, and will also be available to examine close contacts. Secondly, there is the opening of a hospital especially adapted for the reception of leprosy patients. This hospital is provided by University College Hospital as an annexe to the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, and is situated near Redhill, Surrey.

These three new measures—the notification Regulations, the Adviser in Leprosy, the special hospital—mean that no individual leprosy patient need be left without the best possible medical attention and advice under conditions which will enable him to live a more normal and happier life than is otherwise generally possible for anyone who knows that he has leprosy. At the same time they will operate to remove any risk of infection of others which for centuries now has been negligible in this country. It is equally remarkable that the general public have an exaggerated horror of the disease, and a quite irrational fear of infection. It is important for the public to learn that leprosy is an ordinary medical disease, not highly dangerous or infective, and to extend to the person who has been unfortunate enough to contract the disease, sometimes in the service of the Crown, that sympathy and understanding which he deserves.