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Editorial

Abstract

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EDITORIAL

Ask an etymologist or even a schoolboy with the Latin still tingling in his ears about the word hospital. You might glean more meanings subsumed under the word than bargained for; but care for the homeless is one interpretation that has fallen by the wayside. This is as well when the scene of the overcrowded, understaffed Health Service is surveyed. Yet how much in fact is the care for the homeless (a matter of community health) the province of the medical profession?

In this context the spectrum extends from the tramp, the vagrant, the ultimate social casualty, to the flatly intolerable conditions of some 30,000 families — a conservative one per cent of the three million families in Britain who live, according to the Ministry of Housing, in “slums, near-slums or grossly-overcrowded conditions”. Between the extremes are those who have lost their homes, mostly by eviction:

for these it is the hostel, insecure “furnished” lettings, or worse.

Risks to health, mental and physical, are appalling, more especially among the larger families of young children. As a sociomedical problem the case presents with an extremely poor prognosis, and nomadic, insecure (and often structurally dangerous) environments guarantee to see our hospitals, and law courts, in business till well out of this century. Perhaps it is asking too much to expect our hospitals, and more particularly those doctors and social workers critically aware of domiciliary conditions, to turn the problem into one of national urgency. But if steps are not taken in this direction hospitals will find themselves coping, however indirectly, with those 30,000 families.

The aim of this Journal continues to be that of an informative vehicle of the Society's activities; additionally, articles are published which should be of interest to medical undergraduate and postgraduate readers alike. It is hoped that supporters of the Journal will encourage others to subscribe, and to make

subscription easier a bank order system will be available next session.

The resourceful help of Sir John Bruce and Miss Hannah Harkins, assistant editor of the Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons, has never been more appreciated, and the Journal is grateful to them for their advice.