

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON CHILDREN AND CANCER HOSPITALS

Karuna Gamage

(Research Department, People's Bank)

There are four categories of hospitals in Sri Lanka today other than the General Hospital in Colombo. The medical facilities to different areas of the island have been provided by the Government through these hospitals. In addition to providing general medical facilities, there are also hospitals providing specialised treatment to particular ailments such as heart diseases and cancer. In my survey I paid particular attention to the cancer hospital at Maharagama and the children's hospital at Borella.

The Lady Ridgeway Children's Hospital

The Lady Ridgeway is the only children's hospital in Sri Lanka today. The children below the ages of twelve are admitted to this hospital which is comprised of four units and twelve wards, for treatment. Four units are meant for surgery, cases of accidents, pathology, blood pressure and rehabilitation. Out of the 12 wards one is set apart for the professor and five are for medical treatment, for blood pressure and rehabilitation, two wards for surgery three wards and one for throat, ear and nasal ailments. This hospital has been provided with 650 beds, but the number of patients always exceeds the bed capacity.

There are two professors working in this hospital. There is also a special unit handling psychological cases. Except heart and brain operations all other operations on children are performed in



this hospital. There are two laboratories for internal and external work. Two dispensaries at this hospital are open throughout the day. As a result outdoor patients are able to meet the doctors and take treatment at any time during the day as well as in the night. Patients are also able to avail themselves of x-ray and scanning facilities.

Although there are 90 doctors assigned to the hospital, the doctors who are at regular service would not exceed thirty. The others are visiting physicians, thus the number of doctors on regular service is not adequate. The hospital requires the services of over hundred doctors. Among its present staff there are seven specialists, eight surgeons one anaesthetician. Beside them, 213 nurses, 8 nursing sisters and 1 matron comprises its entire staff. Thus this hospital is short of two matrons as well.

The two ambulances available, are engaged during the day and night as the patients have to be transported to other places, for heart examinations and surgical units. The shortage of technicians is also conspicuous. The service of radiographers and technicians of similar type is not available during the night. This could endanger the lives of patients.

However, the food is adequate and methodically supplied.

Even at this hospital daily attendance of patients is apparently on the increase. Average mortality rate per month is around ten. Occasionally that number increases upto 4 to 5 per day.

We learnt from patients themselves that some children are compelled to undergo treatment for indefinite periods because their ailments not being accurately diagnosed. According to my information, one patient, has already spent

over one month without his ailment being properly diagnosed. Therefore steps should be taken to improve the treatment of patients suffering from serious ailments.

The Cancer Hospital at Maharagama

The Cancer Hospital at Maharagama comprised of 17 wards and the work of another ward is being completed. While one ward is used as surgery the rest of the wards are used for medical treatment for the patients. Two wards are being used for treatment for children below 12 years of age.

The patients suffering from womb cancer have been allocated two wards. There is also a clinic at this hospital for the primary diagnosis of Throat Cancer.



On the staff of the hospital there are two surgeons, four visiting radiologists one gynecologist one pathological specialist, one consultant anaesthetist and two assistant anaesthetists. Amongst the nursing staff there are one special grade matron, six nursing sisters and 110 nurses. Although the number of patients at hospital amounts to 550 to 560, there are only 465 beds (including the beds set apart for children.)

The Cancer hospital is mainly managed with voluntary contribution from individuals and social service organisations. The government's share of it falls far below the necessary amount. The average mo-

Contd on page 23

Contd from page 15

rality rate per month at this hospital is around 30 to 32.

The most conspicuous short coming at this hospital is the inadequacy of beds in comparison with the increasing number of patients. As a result patients are compelled reluctantly to occupy floor space lying on mats. The O.P.D. is always overcrowded as the space provided is inadequate to accomodate the patients. Long ques of patients are a daily occurance at this hospital.