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# MATERNAL MORTALITY

DEPUTATION  
TO THE  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

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Pamphlet



# MATERNAL MORTALITY

## Deputation to the Minister of Health

Sir Hilton Young, the Minister of Health, received a deputation to-day (Tuesday, December 11) from the Maternal Mortality Committee.

The deputation was introduced by Mrs. H. J. Tennant, C.H., was supported by representatives of a large number of women's organisations, and represented all three political parties.

Mrs. Tennant said that she much regretted that Lady Iveagh had been prevented by indisposition from introducing the deputation. The deputation represented over 3,000,000 women and was the outcome of a meeting on the question of maternal mortality held on November 6, and their object was to urge a wider provision of first-rate medical and midwifery services and the fuller maintenance and development of the Maternity and Child Welfare services. The importance of the subject had been emphasised by the message sent by the Queen to a Conference held by the Maternal Mortality Committee in 1928 in which Her Majesty said: "The Queen views with grave concern the continued high rate of maternal mortality. Her Majesty feels that a very real endeavour should be made to remove this reproach from our national life."

Mrs. Barton said that malnutrition, though not a primary cause of maternal mortality, was a contributory factor. She feared that the block grant system of Exchequer grants was less effective in stimulating local authorities than the former percentage grants.

Mrs. Frankenburg drew attention to a number of practical points in which the administration of maternity hospitals and the midwifery service could be improved.

Mrs. Anderson referred to the recent inquiry into the death of Mrs. Taylor in Manchester. She feared that the facts brought to light by the inquiry had shaken public confidence.

Lady Barrett, C.H., dealt with the question of ante-natal care and the desirability of appointing at ante-natal centres doctors who were also practising midwifery. She made reference also to the necessity of improving the training of doctors and midwives.

Miss Gregory dealt with the training of midwives and said that midwives should receive a two or three-year course in a first-class hospital. She emphasised the dangers of employing handy women.

Lady Limerick welcomed the announcement by the Minister of the proposed inquiries in areas in which the maternal mortality rate is abnormally high. She referred to the importance of post-natal work and called for the establishment by local authorities of more gynæcological clinics.

Mrs. Alderton said that County Councils should be the Maternity and Child Welfare authorities for all areas except large urban areas. She referred also to the difficulties of establishing a satisfactory service in remote rural areas.

Lady Denman, D.B.E., said that at the last Conference on Maternal Mortality there had been a marked change in the attitude of the delegates. There was evidence of growing impatience at the failure to reduce the maternal mortality rate.

The Minister said that the problem of maternal mortality was a problem which was giving him, as it had given his predecessors, grave concern. Despite the improvement secured in the general mortality rate, there had as yet been no improvement in the maternal mortality rate. A remedy must be found for this state of affairs. He was grateful to the deputation for their co-operation and had listened with interest to the helpful speeches that had been made. The Maternity and Child Welfare Services of local authorities were being steadily developed. No financial check had been placed upon them and they were not affected by the transfer from the percentage grant system to the block grant system. When the transfer was made an additional sum of £5,000,000 was provided by the Exchequer for the development of local authorities' services and the Maternity and Child Welfare Service had been recognised as a first charge upon that sum.

Some of the speakers had suggested that malnutrition was a cause of the high maternal death-rate. There was, however, no evidence to show that there was any close relation between malnutrition and a high maternal mortality rate. Of the actual deaths examined, at least one-half occurred among well-to-do people and it was significant that the maternal death-rate for 1933 in such a depressed area as Durham was no higher than the death-rate in the relatively prosperous county of Middlesex. Nevertheless, the conditions in the depressed areas were undoubtedly such as to give rise to



anxiety, and the position was receiving the close attention of the administration. In particular, local authorities had been urged to make, in appropriate cases, full use of their powers to supply milk and other foods to expectant and nursing mothers.

The Government were at present engaged in co-operation with the local authorities in a strenuous and continuous effort to improve the Maternity and Child Welfare Services throughout the country. Fresh impetus had been given in October last by the Ministry to the development of the maternity services by local authorities and there would be no relaxation until the maternal mortality rate had been reduced. Particular attention was being directed to:—

- (1) Improving the ante-natal service ;
- (2) ensuring that the services of a trained midwife are available for all confinements ;
- (3) securing the provision of maternity beds for complicated cases and for patients with unsuitable home conditions, such beds to be associated where practicable with general hospitals, preferably in small units readily supervised, and for which prompt specialist services for serious cases may be made available ;
- (4) providing facilities for the adequate isolation and separate nursing of cases of puerperal sepsis ; and
- (5) obtaining the services of a consultant for doctors needing assistance in difficult or complicated cases.

In addition to this general work, special inquiries were about to be made in those areas in which the maternal mortality rate had been found to be abnormally high. Further action would be based on the result of these investigations. Careful consideration would be given to the useful and practical suggestions which had been made by the deputation.

Lady Cynthia Colville expressed to the Minister the thanks of the deputation for their reception.

Ministry of Health,  
Whitehall, S.W.1.  
*December 11, 1934.*