THE ROYAL ARMY DENTAL CORPS DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS

BY

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I welcome this opportunity, on behalf of a young and small Corps, to salute the Royal Army Medical Corps on this anniversary and to record how the Royal Army Dental Corps has fared over the last ten years. All ranks of the R.A.D.C. regard it as a great privilege to have been associated so closely with the R.A.M.C. Long may this continue.

What happens in the R.A.D.C. must reflect to some extent what happens in the civil profession, and during the last ten years the events outside have had very real effects on the Corps.

The coming into being of the National Health Dental Service entirely changed the civil dentistry background. To begin with, its introduction in 1948 found far too few dentists on the register to cope with the sudden overwhelming demand for free complete dental treatment and the position was worsened by a shortage, difficult to explain, of entrants to the dental schools. The dentists who undertook National Health treatment were overworked, but their earnings were high, and so it was inevitable that at first there were a number of retirements from the R.A.D.C. to civil life and its settled security. While during the last four years retirements on this account have practically ceased, the civil attractions have deterred National Service officers from taking Regular commissions, and the Army cannot offer sufficient benefits to counter them.

The intake of National Service officers has not been sufficient to fill the gap but nevertheless most of the time the Army has had adequate dental cover comparable with that of the civilian population. It has, however, been a struggle and it is, of course, a disadvantage that so great a proportion of the Corps is newly qualified. While this short article cannot discuss the problem that will arise when National Service ends, it can be said that although the dental schools are now filled, their capacity is very limited and the shortage of dentists is likely to continue for a long time.

There probably have been greater changes in dental procedures over the last ten years than in any like period before. This has meant considerable changes for the Corps in equipment and practice. While the constant change of Corps personnel because of National Service has had many disadvantages, it has had one benefit which we surely welcome; that this stream of newly qualified men has freshened us continually with the latest teaching from the schools and with their own professional enthusiasm. Coupled with this must be mentioned that in the period under review a number of the schools have re-equipped as also has the civil profession to some extent. Much new and imposing equipment and material have become available. Unfortunately, due to financial stringency, the Army Dental Service has not been able to keep pace with these improvements.
and changes. This probably has told against us in the recruiting both of officers and other ranks. Nevertheless, some of the larger new items of equipment are gradually being supplied. The increased awareness of the layman regarding dentistry and its benefits is an encouragement and the Corps cannot but wish that it had the facilities to do more of the great amount of treatment that needs to be done. One direction in which real progress has been made is in the increased number of postgraduate courses which are held for Regular and Short Service officers. For this, financial and outside facilities have happily become available. Further, there has been a widening generally of the contacts with the civil profession with great benefit to the Corps. Important too, is the fact that the Corps is taking part in dental research in co-operation with outside bodies. A great deal has been done to bring the Corps specialists into line with the new standards for consultants in curative dentistry and facilities have been provided to allow trainee specialists to take the Fellowship in Dental Surgery and to do part-time work in selected civil hospitals.

Lack of money and doubts about the size and location of the future Army have made it impossible to effect great improvements in dental accommodation. Much of the war-time accommodation has continued in use and is most unsatisfactory by modern standards. Poor working conditions have done much to militate against the recruiting of dental officers and also of technicians and clerical assistants.

Pleasing has been the success of the dental hygienists (Q.A.R.A.N.C.) trained at the R.A.D.C. Depot and Training Establishment. This ancillary is now being introduced into civil life, and the training methods employed by the Army are in part at least to be used in the civilian training centres, so there are excellent civilian prospects for the women trained in the Army. Unfortunately there are not enough personnel available for our needs. It would be a tremendous help if there were more Q.A.R.A.N.C. to do dental clerical assistant work with the Corps. It is a woman's job. The few that are attached for dental duties have done excellently.

There have been a number of improvements over the last few years in prosthetic procedures, and the dental technician training given in the Corps is still probably the best that can be obtained anywhere. But we have too few of these tradesmen.

Thus despite all the difficulties, many of them not peculiar to the Corps, the last ten years have seen progress in many important directions.