

## M I S C E L L A N E O U S

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### REHABILITATION OF THE SICK AND DISABLED

*The Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge has on several occasions published studies on a question of general interest—the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped. Immediately after the Second World War many new efforts were made in this field, in which Great Britain took a large share. We thought it would be of interest to continue the studies already published, by reproducing an article by Dr J. Siegfried in the Gazette de Lausanne (March 4-5, 1961) on the rehabilitation of the disabled and sick, and the example given by Great Britain in this connection.*

The rehabilitation of a sick or disabled person is a continuous process which should lead to a satisfactory result and the patient's return to his work. It is a social problem of national concern in which every country is more or less closely involved. One country, however, more than any other, has devoted every care to this problem which it considers to be of general interest, namely Great Britain. The approach made to the problem and the fine results achieved deserve to be reviewed.

During the war years it became most important for Great Britain to recuperate injured or sick workers with all possible speed and even to recruit disabled persons who had given up work for some years past. The Ministry of Health undertook to make hospital treatment available while the Ministry of Labour endeavoured to find appropriate employment in each case after providing facilities for industrial rehabilitation, training courses and even vocational education.

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After the war the Government continued its efforts in this direction since it had been proved that the output of the handicapped was as essential to the national economy as that of workers in good health.

After fairly rapid development, there has been little change in the organisation and functioning of rehabilitation in Great Britain over the past ten years, so that this relatively stable period will serve to appraise the results achieved.

According to the British Medical Association, about 50,000 sick and injured persons qualify for rehabilitation every year. This figure is still more striking considering the fact that there were nearly 800,000 handicapped on the Ministry of Labour records on April 16, 1956.

Quite apart from the question of numbers, the increase in the average age of the population of Great Britain and the relatively advanced age of a great many handicapped persons make the problem still more arduous from social and technical aspects. As an example, at the Roehampton Centre 70% of the amputated patients are over 54 and 54% are over 60.

Rehabilitation services in Great Britain have been organised on a national level and divided into medical and industrial sections. In fact, this division is purely administrative and so-called "medical rehabilitation" does not signify any drastic measures; this term refers merely to medical and subsequent treatment (for instance physiotherapy) given in the hospital itself. This aim is sought all over the world. It is possible that in British hospitals it is given closer study and that a practical programme has been adopted based upon the patient's future return to normal life.

### INDUSTRIAL REHABILITATION

Industrial rehabilitation concerns the resettlement of the handicapped in industrial trades and their admittance to special or sheltered employment. The Ministry of Labour has set up rehabilitation centres for this purpose to which the handicapped are admitted after medical treatment.

The object of the industrial rehabilitation centres is to estimate the physical and mental capacities of a patient in view of his appropriate resettlement in an industrial trade, at once or after

a course of vocational training. In 1957, fifteen of these centres were functioning in Great Britain ; the first was opened in 1943 at Egham in a country house with sufficient grounds to build workshops and dormitories. From 1948 other centres were opened.

The Egham Centre can take 170 men and 30 women. The average duration of the training course is eight weeks but can be prolonged to cover twelve weeks. In principle, the Centre accepts all applications for rehabilitation courses, since experience has shown that astonishing results can be obtained in cases which appeared to be hopeless.

The centres are modelled on industrial establishments. The patient tests his capacities and performs all sorts of progressive exercises in workshops equipped with the necessary machines and tools. His training is continued gradually up to the point where he could support the strain of a full working day. Efforts are made to create a " working " atmosphere so far as possible. The sections are numerous and a great many trades are practised. The centres compete in the open market for contracts ; for instance, the British Post Office sends telephone apparatus for revision to Egham Centre in the same way as to business firms. There is less wastage in the work of the Centre where the workmen come from all branches of industry than in workshops of professional concerns.

Nevertheless, in a great many cases, a disabled person in an industrial rehabilitation centre does not acquire the independence and skill required to find employment in the open market. In such cases a physically handicapped person will be employed by the State in a government workshop where, even if his output is deficient, he will be paid the same wages as a worker in a private business. These workshops (engaged in the manufacture, for instance, of the orthopaedic footwear and apparatus supplied to the disabled in Great Britain through the National Health Service) are naturally run at a loss and are a heavy liability for the Government.

When a patient in an industrial rehabilitation centre shows particular ability in any special work (this occurs in about 20% of the cases) he is sent to a government training centre where all the main industries with the appropriate machinery are represented and clerical work is also taught. The training course is of about six months' duration, during which the learner receives an allowance.

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After finishing the course his future employment is practically assured.

In Great Britain the Government is not the only body concerned with the aid of the physically handicapped ; private concerns have also made a great effort, for instance Vauxhall General Motors, Luton. This huge motor-car works (18,000 employees) has built a special workshop where the usual machinery has been altered to give physical exercise to the workers. Thus, an electric drill can be transformed to start with a pedal or clutch for the use of workers who have suffered limb disablements. These machines enable the worker to perform simple repetitive movements which improve his general health. The treatment is based on the principle that the disabled person's attention is concentrated on his work and not on the movement of a limb. Thus the critical stage—and the ensuing early state of fatigue—will be avoided since the worker no longer tends to contract any particular muscle. Moreover, a few adjustments to the lever afford greater flexibility to the fingers, combined, if necessary, with hot air applications (in cases of rheumatism or accidental injury). Furthermore, the position of the lever reduces swelling through the contraction of the muscles by pulling and the weight, and eases the movement of the shoulder. As this workshop is a definite part of the assembly line, its production is therefore expected to be turned out at the same rate as in others. This competition plays a considerable part in the rehabilitation of the disabled.

## RESETTLEMENT

The purpose of the resettlement of the disabled is to enable them to obtain steady employment in the same conditions, so far as possible, as able-bodied workers and to work with the latter. The measures adopted in Great Britain for the employment of the disabled provide every possibility for achieving this result ; they include for instance the registration of the disabled (optional) at the Disablement Employment Exchange, the quota system whereby for all concerns employing more than twenty workers 3% of the personnel must be registered disabled persons, as well

as the special section for disabled workers in each of the Labour Exchanges (under the Ministry of Labour).

Another scheme, the Remploy Factories, has been in force since 1945. The purpose of these establishments is to provide sheltered employment for seriously disabled. At present, there are ninety of these establishments (financed by the Government) in which over 6,000 seriously disabled workers are employed.

Since the institution of these various services at the end of the Second World War, following the law relating to the employment of the disabled passed in 1944, the continuous period of full employment has made the placing of the disabled in all parts of the country a relatively easy matter. The Ministry of Labour has sought, therefore, to place as many of the disabled in ordinary business concerns as in sheltered employment. Each year it has succeeded in finding employment in industry for over a thousand registered disabled persons who were considered unlikely to find work other than in sheltered establishments. It is worthy of note that unemployed seriously disabled, of whom there were 13,000 in 1946, numbered only 4,000 in 1955 and this figure has not varied since then.

Rehabilitation measures for the sick and injured in Great Britain have given ample proof since their institution of the value and importance of functional retraining, both for the disabled themselves and the community. Through the experience and knowledge acquired the fundamental principles of the professional rehabilitation of the physically handicapped are now freely acknowledged in Great Britain. The British method has shown that the return of the disabled to independent status and a useful social life is not only of infinite human value, but their rehabilitation is a profitable public investment.

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