National Council of American Ophthalmologists

Attention has already been directed in the December number of this journal to the valuable report on the teaching of ophthalmology by a Committee of the American Ophthalmological Society, contained in their Transactions for 1923.

Another item in that volume, which merits more than a passing notice, is contained in the report of the Executive Session of the Society. It was there announced that the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Oto-laryngology had invited the Society to take part in the formation of a National Council. The resolution adopted by the Academy was worded thus:

"Believing that the general welfare of the public and that of ophthalmology, otology, and oto-laryngology, can best be served by the creation of some central representative committee chosen by the various existing accredited special societies;

"Be it resolved: That the Council of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Oto-laryngology appoint such delegates who shall join with members appointed from the various other societies for the purpose of forming such a National Council. This National Council shall concern itself with all matters concerning the welfare of the special branches and that of the public in relation to the practice of such specialties. Among its various functions it shall take measures necessary to:

"(a) The establishment and maintenance of higher medical standards for the practice of the special branches.

"(b) For the proper influencing of legislation.

"(c) For the education and enlightenment of the general public through whatever channels it may find proper."

The Committee of the Society reported in favour of this resolution and the President was asked to appoint a member to serve on this National Council.

Our readers are aware that a few years ago ophthalmic surgeons in Great Britain became impressed with the advisability, nay more, the necessity, of a central committee representative of ophthalmologists throughout the kingdom, to which the interests of ophthalmology might be entrusted. The result was the formation in 1918 of the Council of British Ophthalmologists.

Ophthalmic surgeons in this country will welcome the decision of their American colleagues to establish a National Council and will note with gratification that its aims and objects run parallel to those of the British Council. It may well happen that mutual co-operation may strengthen the hands of the two bodies, and...
Annotating

stimulate the members in their endeavours to promote the interests of their branches of medicine in the widest sense.

It is generally conceded that the work already accomplished by the Council of British Ophthalmologists has fulfilled the expectations of its founders, and has more than justified its formation. We shall probably be safe in prophesying that a few years hence the American National Council will possess an equally commendable record.

Optical Benefits

The daily Press has recently drawn attention to the autocratic way in which the Ministry of Health administered the National Health Insurance Act, in so far that the permanent officials are able to impose penalties on panel practitioners. It seems also that they are able to alter the statutory rules and orders of this Act. Under the Additional Benefits Regulations, 1921, the payment of the whole or part of the cost of optical treatment and appliances was only to be made on the production of a prescription by a qualified practitioner or a hospital, except in cases where a claim is in respect of the renewal of an appliance. In other words according to this schedule no payment should be made by a society for the cost of spectacles, unless they have been prescribed by a medical man. The Ministry of Health have taken upon themselves not to insist upon the prescription of a medical man where the Insurance Society does not desire it. The result is that the diagnosis of the defects of vision is largely placed in the hands of opticians, who administer the optical benefits for the approved societies. It is hardly necessary for us to say that such optical treatment cannot be safely undertaken without a full knowledge of diseases of the eye, and the administration of ophthalmic benefits by most of the approved societies as now carried out is fraught with danger to the public, not only with regard to their eyesight but even in some cases to life.

It is to be hoped that the Royal Commission which is shortly going to report on the National Insurance Act will take cognisance of this anomaly, and will take into consideration the report which has been issued on sight-testing opticians by the Council of British Ophthalmologists (Vol. VI, 1922), and the recommendations of the Departmental Committee on the "Causes and Prevention of Blindness," 1922.