National Health Insurance—Ophthalmic Benefits

Now that ophthalmic benefits as part of the Insurance Act administered by medical practitioners with a knowledge of ophthalmology is likely to come into partial operation very shortly, it would be as well to give a short account of the negotiations which have led up to their adoption and to the conditions under which they are to be administered.

The Council of British Ophthalmologists in October, 1921, had their attention called to the fact that optical appliances and treatment were being provided by various approved societies through opticians. The Council at once communicated with the Ministry of Health and pointed out that the surplus funds of the approved societies contributed for medical treatment were being used for this purpose and suggested that the Ministry should take immediate steps to prevent such negotiations being undertaken, until at least the report of the Departmental Committee on the "Causes and Prevention of Blindness" had been considered. The Ministry replied that the societies which adopted the additional benefit of optical treatment were able to do so because the department had not insisted on the optical appliances only being made on the production of a prescription from a qualified practitioner or hospital. This correspondence was sent on to the Committee on the "Causes and Prevention of Blindness," and their recommendation was given in their report (Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness, 1922). Nothing further arose out of the recommendations, and requests came from various bodies of ophthalmic surgeons throughout the country to the Council of British Ophthalmologists to take further steps. The Council applied to the Ministry of Health pointing out that ophthalmic appliances should be prescribed by a medical man, and that their original rules and orders should be adhered to. As the result of this communication a deputation was sent to the Ministry of Health at the end of March, 1924, when the matter was discussed. Shortly after this the Council of British Ophthalmologists joined forces with the British Medical Association and a committee from both bodies was formed and subsequently representatives from the Ophthalmic Benefits Committee were added. Discussions took place at the Ministry of Health, and the following arrangements were proposed and were subsequently accepted by the representatives of the approved societies, and come into force on July 1, 1925. Members of those approved societies which provide ophthalmic benefit must, in the first instance, consult their insurance practitioner, who, in suitable cases, will give them a recommendation to their approved society to the effect that the symptoms found arise from defects of the
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eyes or call for examination and report on the condition of the eyes, and that the society should refer the patients to an ophthalmologist on the approved list. This "approved list" is to be supplied and maintained by the British Medical Association, and is to contain the names of medical practitioners who satisfy certain now familiar criteria which will be found in detail in paragraph 24 of the Evidence of the Association, presented to the Royal Commission on National Health Insurance (Supplement, February 28, 1925, p. 73). Besides satisfying these criteria doctors on the list must be willing to accept an inclusive fee of £1 ls. for each insured person sent to them by approved societies.

Lists of medical men who possess the necessary qualifications and are willing to undertake the work, are being prepared by the British Medical Association, and names should be sent in to the secretary of the British Medical Association. These lists at present contain about 500 names.

CONVENTION OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING OPHTHALMOLOGICAL SOCIETIES

TO BE HELD IN LONDON, JULY 14, 15, 16 and 17, 1925.

Under the auspices of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom and its Affiliated Societies.

The full programme of this Convention to be held in London on July 14, 15, 16, and 17, 1925, is now in our hands. The President is Mr. E. Treacher Collins; the General Secretary, Mr. C. B. Goulden; the Secretary of the Committee for Scientific Business and Publications, Mr. R. Foster Moore; of the Committee for General Arrangements and Entertainments, Mr. J. F. Cunningham; of the Committee for Finance and Registration, Mr. Leslie Paton; of the Banquet Committee, Mr. M. S. Mayou; of the Museum Committee, Miss Ida Mann.

The following members of affiliated Societies will be willing to assist overseas members who, after the Convention, are desirous of visiting the parts of the country mentioned:

North of England Ophthalmological Society. — P. J. Hay, 35, Glossop Road, Sheffield.