

Editorial

The Prevention of Cancer of the Cervix

Most of us who have been to schools must know of one widely taught Axiom "PREVENTION IS ALWAYS BETTER THAN CURE". This applies to almost all problems in life; but referring to medical sciences, at the turn of this century, King Edward VII of Britain in a reference to Tuberculosis said "IF PREVENTABLE, WHY NOT PREVENTED?" The same challenge is now applicable to Cancer of the Cervix. Prevention is indeed a Public Health Problem.

Cancer of the Cervix inevitably leads to death and there will be some who will say, if one does not die of cancer, one will die of something else. This is true to an extent, but the importance of Cancer in general, is the appalling morbidity before it kills. There is the added factor of worries and agonies which beset not only the afflicted but also those immediately around, and the hopeless inadequacies of facilities for terminal nursing for these patients, not to mention the costs—all in all, reveal one facet of an important public social problem which Society must face and tackle.

In most advanced countries of the world, this problem has already received active consideration and this Bulletin welcomes the public announcement by the present Minister for Health, the Honourable Mr. Yong Nyuk Lin, that the Government will set up a Female Genital Cancer Screening Unit for the State of Singapore. This Unit will be based at the Kandang Kerbau Hospital, and it is hoped that when fully evolved, the women of Singapore will be able to receive adequate screening for Cancer of the Cervix, as the population at large is able to receive adequate screening for Pulmonary Tuberculosis.

Somewhere amongst the pages of the present issue of the Bulletin is a publication of the panel discussion which had been conducted by the Post-Graduate Committee of the Kandang Kerbau Hospital. The discussion entitled "The Early Detection of Female Genital Cancer" covers some of the technical aspects of the problem and it will be needless to argue any further of established facts. Every year, some 120 to 150 patients appear at this Hospital with frank cancer of the female genital tract, especially the cervix; but it is computed that amongst the female population at large, there must be at least three undetected cases for every established case. With knowledge at the present time, established cancer must face this fact—that there is no radical cure for frank cancer and the measures that Medical Science has at this time, including Surgery and modern Radiotherapy, are in effect, only attempting towards a cure. Cancer is thus a common lethal disease until Research can evolve perhaps a "Pill" which can cure the disease as antibiotics today can clear lethal infectious diseases of the previous years.

Like most Public Health problems, screening for Cancer of the Cervix requires public support. Intensive public health education must be employed and we must not allow modesty and near-prudery amongst our community to be a drawback towards the ultimate aim of complete prevention of the disease.

It is realised that any Public project such as this requires a sufficient budget to meet the costs. It is estimated at this time, that the cost of detecting a single "Pick-Up" case is in the region of \$500/- (£60). This is the same cost that will be involved in detecting a single case of Pulmonary Tuberculosis in a Mass Radiography campaign. This latter campaign is already an established service in the State today. But one big difference stands out between the two conditions—Tuberculosis is curable and Cancer is not. It is thus logical to state that Cancer Screening Service must appear to have more cogent reasons to exist.

It is the view that we can and should face the cost in effort and the money necessary for this public service. Whilst in many other public problems, the Public Service Administration can advise that we cannot afford the particular service; it is felt that in THIS PARTICULAR PUBLIC SERVICE, perhaps the public themselves should have their say—and the Public might well choose to afford it. The earlier this mooted service starts its work, the better.