

DENTAL REPORT

The dental work at Stuyvesant House is done with the co-operation of the Allied Dental Clinic, 251 Fourth Ave. Some years ago, Mr. Steinam established a fund at the Clinic which was for the benefit of our members, and which was to be applied in payment of dental work done at the Allied Dental Clinic on our members.

Thereafter it naturally became our policy to take advantage of the fund and have all of our work done through the Allied Dental Clinic. Further, the Executive Director felt that not only should the fund be used when necessary but also that special effort ought to be made to see that the fund was used. In other words, the neighborhood worker was instructed to drum up trade and to find persons to send to the Clinic, so that the fund should be used constantly.

In all of my work, I have been ever reluctant to supply things that are free. For the person with a spirit of independence the sense of pride is not injured. For the professional charity seeker, the road is made harder. Also, there is a natural tendency on the part of all persons to minimize the importance of anything which comes without the payment of money. Therefore, from the beginning, I have never employed the fund created for work at the Allied Dental Clinic to provide free dental service. Always I used my own judgment as to just what part of the actual cost of the work a particular individual could pay, and the charges ranged from a purely nominal sum to the actual cost. In order to have my policy conform with that of the Executive Director, the Clinic was paid out of the Fund and the money I received was turned over to a house fund, to be applied to the established fund when it came out.

I have never found the arrangement satisfactory. Many persons felt that any service obtained through a settlement house should be free and even though these persons were able to pay, they were reluctant to do so. Many took the attitude that since they had to pay for treatment, they preferred to go to their private dentists. I never sought to dissuade them from doing this for if they could afford to go to private men, there was no reason for us to use time and energy in taking care of them.

Often patients from whom I was receiving money would mingle with others whom they met at the Clinic while waiting for treatment, and these others would tell our people that they were being treated free of charge. This naturally engendered dissatisfaction and a feeling that they were being discriminated against. Yet this was no reason why persons who could pay should get free treatment.

The dental work was also unsatisfactory with respect to appointments. It has been impossible to inculcate the attitude that dental appointments at the Clinic demanded as much consideration as similar appointments with a physician or a dentist, or perhaps the trouble was that these people were accustomed to the neighborhood doctors and dentists where the visits are not made by appointment, but by necessity or convenience. At any rate, punctuality and regularity were never achieved and consequently much time, energy and money (money because charges are made by the clinic for each appointment even though broken) were dissipated.

Another source of dissatisfaction was due to the necessity of actively seeking persons and coaxing and cajoling them to have their teeth treated so that the fund would not go unused.

Still another was the waste in having to send a worker with just a few

few children at a time to the Clinic because either there were only a few to send or because many appointments were broken.

Several complaints in this work are chargeable to the Allied Dental Clinic itself. Before I can even approximately tell a person what the expense involved will be, it is of course necessary to have an estimate from the Clinic. The people at the Allied Dental Clinic have been tardy in the furnishing of these estimates, and I have been reproached by many persons because the cost exceeded their reckoning, and I have been told the usual story that "if I had been told at the start what this would cost, I never would have gone, etc., etc.,"

In order that I might be informed of the progress and achievement of the dental work, I have repeatedly requested monthly reports from the Clinic with respect to the work done upon our members. These reports are never given regularly, but rather sporadically, and then only after constant pressure on my part.

Adult patients continually report inattention and down-right discourtesy with respect to the attitude of both dentist and nurse at the Clinic. This is naturally resented, even by free patients and especially by those who feel and who are made to feel that they are paying for any treatment they are receiving.

Another source of complaint lies in the poor system of arranging appointments. This should be arranged so that the same patient is treated by the same dentist throughout the entire work. This is not done. Patients commonly are not treated by the same man twice in succession. This is poor management, not only because it prevents the establishment of that confidence and friendliness that comes from repeated contact with the same dentist but also has led to confusion, waste of time and more or less serious mistakes.

In addition to all this, there have been several instances of incompetent treatment. One woman who had a tooth filled by a private dentist had this same filling removed by mistake at the Allied Dental Clinic. Another time a woman was required to have an operation after some defective work had been performed at the Clinic. Another complained of pain and discomfort which the dentist tried to alleviate in the beginning. Later, however, he announced he could do no more and refused further aid. Months afterward, it was discovered that this patient had a broken tooth under a bridge that was causing all of the trouble. Often children whose teeth had been filled complained of pains in these and had to be sent back for treatment.

It is my opinion therefore that both from the point of view of the work at Stuyvesant House and from the point of view of the work at the Clinic itself, the results are unsatisfactory. The chief trouble is that we are urging people to do something about which they are indifferent and that when we succeed in getting them to consent to what we ask, we do not provide suitable service.

I think that we should be able to provide for people who come to us out of urgency and necessity. Then the coaxing is eliminated and regularity is assured. Furthermore when persons ask us for help, the critical or complaining attitude is non-existent. In such cases the entire burden should be shifted upon the Clinic, once we have brought the person there.

In conclusion I wish to mention that the Allied Dental Clinic is not the only solution to our dental work. There are clinics at the Boy's Club and at the Dental Colleges on 23rd St. and 35th St., and at hospital clinics, where the work though not so satisfactory, is nevertheless doing a great deal of prevention work with children and is much sought by adults because of its cheapness.