

Cash runs out for operations

IN SPITE of government advice that hospitals should increase their family planning service, for men and women on Merseyside who want vasectomy or sterilisation operations in hospital, the answer is still likely to be: Pay up or wait!

Last July, Barbara Castle asked regional health authorities to expand the family planning service in hospitals and to make vasectomy and female sterilisation freely available — for social, as well as medical reasons.

This work was already included in National Health contracts. But to encourage consultants to operate on wider grounds, financial incentives were offered.

The incentives are extra fees for each operation. It can cost the area health authority as much as £24 to £32 for one operation:

VASECTOMY— Surgeon: £16.25, anaesthetist: £8; Total: £24.25.

STERILISATION— Surgeon: £22, anaesthetist £10.75; Total: £32.75.

Fees are also payable to radiologists and pathologists for the necessary tests in connection with this work.

For the combined operation of abortion and sterilisation, consultants are now entitled to collect £14.70. (In Liverpool it is often a condition of abortion that sterilisation is done at the same time. The combined operation is much more dangerous than either operation on its own.)

These are the only operations for which incentives are paid.

The above rates are ludicrously high when compared to those of the clinics run by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and the Family Planning Association (FPA). They employ doctors on a sessional

basis. Between three and ten vasectomies are performed during one session, and cost on average £5 each.

For the past two years Liverpool Area Health Authority has been providing a free vasectomy service for men through BPAS at much less cost than the new arrangements. The authority is looking into the possibility of extending these arrangements to sterilisation.

According to the Regional Health Authority, the two clinic agencies in Liverpool provide a very adequate service more cheaply and give three times more value for money.

Apart from the economic aspect, there are dangers in the new scheme:

- It could attract consultants simply for monetary gain who in the past have shown little or no interest in this type of work.
- It would be quite wrong if important decisions affecting patients

may be taken or influenced by consultants eager for financial reward.

● It is surely essential for decisions about sterilisation and abortion to be taken free from pressures on both sides, which makes the introduction of financial incentives for this type of operation both worrying and undesirable.

At first the Department of Health offered no extra cash to implement the proposals. Cries of 'No money—no deal' were heard.

Eventually £45,300 was made available for Liverpool (£15,100 for Wirral). But this was not enough. It was based on the previous year's figures for operations done only on medical grounds, and did not include operations sought on social grounds.

The £45,300 was a once-and-for-all sum. From this month there will be no money earmarked for family

planning in hospitals. So people who want this type of operation in future will probably have to wait until more money is available. Meanwhile another pregnancy may occur.

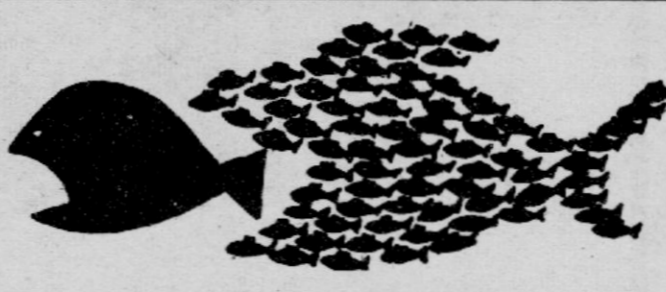
Alternatively, they can pay — if they can afford it — or perhaps they will be lucky and find a consultant who puts people's needs before cash.

Most Liverpool consultants are prepared to continue working to contract. But in Wirral there has already been a backlash. It is understood that certain consultants are likely not to do the work if they do not get the incentive payments.

So the real result of the grand ideas from the Department of Health may be a worsening of the service. That could have been avoided by persuading consultants to include wider reasons for doing the operations, without dangling a carrot in front of them.



LOCAL ACTION



Squatting granny worries the Corpy

A 74-YEAR-OLD Everton woman has become Merseyside's oldest squatter.

Mrs Sarah Wells, a widow, was forced to move out of her third-floor flat in Haigh Heights when it was flooded. Children had apparently broken a water pipe in one of the many empty flats above her.

The corporation said the only place they could put her was Langtry House, the temporary home for the homeless. Fortunately, Mrs Wells had a family to support her.

"I said my mother's not going to Langtry House, why should she?" a daughter, Mrs Mary Maloney told us. "I said the only alternative is to squat in a place."

Another daughter, Mrs Margaret Murphy, blamed the corporation for not looking after the flats. "The corporation know what's going on and they're just letting it happen — then they're treating people like dirt."

With the help of her relatives, Mrs Wells and the 10-year-old granddaughter who lives with her, moved into an empty two-bedroom flat in Willmott Walk on the new estate off Everton Road.

They got the electricity turned on and told the corporation what they'd done. The corporation were obviously worried about bad publicity. They said if Mrs Wells would just move out for half a day, she would get the key to some multi-storey flat. But the flat was unspecified and Mrs Wells refused.

After talking it over with her family, Mrs Wells eventually agreed to go back to her flat in Haigh Heights, provided it was put back in good condition. "I can't do any fairer than that," she said.

But so far the corporation are saying it will take weeks to repair her old flat. So Mrs Wells is staying in her new flat in Willmott Walk until she is rehoused.

● The six members of the Houghton family [see last month's Free Press] who squatted in an empty house rather than stay in a damp, unhealthy maisonette in Belle Vale — have been evicted.

But that hasn't stopped their fight. They're now squatting in a different house in Peckmill Green, Netherley.



Mrs Wells — flooded out

Parents in Town Hall school demo

FORTY PARENTS were among those protesting outside Liverpool Town Hall last month. They lobbied members of the education committee who were about to cut £1.7 million off the education budget.

What prompted these parents to join the picket line were the particular cuts being made at their children's schools.

Lidderdale infants and Morrison junior schools near Sefton Park are to lose between them four members of staff, including one full-time teacher and three part-time staff.

All these teachers are involved in coaching backward or remedial reading. The head teachers, along with the parents, say that the standards of literacy may fall if these teachers are axed. They feel that educational standards cannot be equated with financial expediency. The combined salaries of the three part-timers only amounts to eight-tenths of a full-time teacher's salary.

In all, forty Liverpool schools have been asked to cut staff levels. The allotted ratio is one teacher to thirty pupils.

But because these parents have been fighting back, the Deputy Director of Education is said to be "considering" their views.

New directory

REMEMBER the Merseyside People's Yellow Pages? It was a useful little booklet listing addresses and phone numbers of community, alternative and political groups and advice centres on Merseyside.

Unfortunately it's now hopelessly out of date, but there are plans to bring out a second edition.

Groups who want to be included should send their name, address, phone number, and a few words about themselves to:

Mandy Vere, Open Ear, 39 Manesty's Lane, Liverpool 1 (708 7174).

Whale campaign

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH are making progress in their campaign to save the sperm whale from extinction [see Free Press 24]. Liverpool Trades Council unanimously passed a resolution aimed at preventing imports of sperm oil into Britain.

One effect of this resolution is that FoE are getting information from the docks about sperm oil imports. The S.S. Post Challenger carried sperm oil to Eastham Dock in January. The docks section of the TGWU are also considering blacking cargoes of sperm oil.

Why the press 'discovered' new Kirkby offices

THE NATIONAL PRESS have at last discovered the interesting office block being built in Kirkby town centre.

In February 1975, the Free Press reported that the man involved with some of Harold Wilson's closest associates — Lady Falkender and her brother, Tony Field — in the famous "slag heaps" affair had pulled off another remarkable land deal in Wilson's own constituency.

The man, Isle of Man businessman Philip Moore Clague, did very well in Kirkby. He had somehow heard about the office block site, and negotiated an extremely generous lease from Kirkby Council without competition, and by-passing the usual channels.

At one stage, Moor Clague even had a tenant lined up for the offices — none other than the local council. (This now seems to have fallen through.)

No newspaper was interested in following up the Free Press story last year. But last month Harold Wilson announced he was going to resign as Prime Minister.

Someone involved in local politics phoned several newspapers with the unlikely tale that his resignation was because of what was going to come out of police inquiries into corruption in Kirkby.

As a result, stories about the Kirkby office block appeared in both The Guardian and the Daily Telegraph.

One of the people reporters tried to interview was, of course, former council leader Dave Tempest. As usual, Tempest played a prominent part in the Kirkby land deal. But he evaded at least one journalist's questions by saying he was suing the Free Press.

(For the record, Mr Fixit is not suing the Free Press — although a personal court appearance by him shortly cannot entirely be ruled out.)

Knowsley Council quickly called a press conference to deny there was anything fishy about the office project.

One interesting new fact emerged. The five-storey office block which Kirkby Council originally gave planning permission for, now turns out to be seven storeys.

Asked about this, David Love, Knowsley's Borough Solicitor and formerly Assistant Clerk to Kirkby Council, is reported to have said: "I've often wondered about that myself."

No doubt there's some perfectly innocent explanation to this, and to all those other curious features about Kirkby's office block.

Appeal likely over police case damages

GERALD Henderson, the Aintree teenager who successfully sued the police for assault, is to appeal against the amount of damages fixed.

He was awarded only £1 after being beaten in the back of a police Land Rover, when wrongly arrested for stealing a car. Henderson spent three days in hospital with eye injuries.

His was the third successful action for assault or false imprisonment brought against Merseyside police so far this year.

But the police did get a conviction in the case of Tommy Satchell

and Rita Lindsay. The couple had complained on Granada television that they had been attacked in a police Land Rover.

They were charged with wasting police time by making a false complaint. And the Granada film was used as evidence against them.

They were both convicted by majority verdicts and given suspended sentences. No doubt the police hope the case will bring down the embarrassingly high level of complaints against them — thought to be around 600 last year.

PROGRESSIVE BOOKS

12 BERRY STREET, LIVERPOOL 1

Tel: 709 1905

BEST SELLER: John Gollan "Socialist Democracy — Some Problems" (Discussion of Stalin, the 20th Congress and democracy in the USSR) 30p.

We stock Morning Star, Tribune and Labour Weekly

Just in — TUC handbooks, including Health and Safety at Work, 35p