

Short Maternity Stay in Hospitals Blamed on Poor Insurance Plans

By JOHN F. ALLEN

Mothers and their new born babies are being forced out of hospital maternity wards long before they should be, due largely to the poor coverage provided by California's pre-paid health insurance plans.

This opinion, long held by the typical mother herself, was expressed here yesterday by Clarence E. Wonnacott, co-ordinator of twelve Mormon hospitals in Utah and expert on hospital economics.

Wonnacott will be one of the chief speakers this morning before the opening session of the twenty-fifth annual convention of the Association of Western Hospitals, which will meet for four days at Civic Auditorium. **ECONOMIC HARDSHIP.**

He said that in San Francisco, as in the West generally, most mothers are forced by economic circumstances to leave the hospital within two to four days.

Actually, Wonnacott said, the average mother should be permitted to stay for at least five days, and perhaps as much as ten, depending upon her condition and that of her child.

As of now, he said, the typical family pre-paid hospital policy sold by either Blue Cross or California Physicians Service allows only \$50 for maternity hospitalization.

AVERAGE COST.

Even for three full days in a hospital—entirely aside from delivery fees, drugs and other costs—the average cost for a new baby will run to \$75 or more.

This is why, Wonnacott said, the average new mother feels it necessary to get out of the hospital as soon as possible.

"Within three days," he said, "the mother has used up the money she has coming from her insurance and already has run up at least \$25 in additional cost."

"Much as she may need additional rest, or as much as she and her baby may face the risk of physical complications, the economic pressures of home life force her out, regardless of the fact that she may have to go back to scrubbing floors or caring for earlier children."

COSTS INCREASED.

Twenty years ago the average stay of a mother in a hospital following the birth of her child was ten days and the entire hospital cost ran to about \$65.

The average cost today is from \$10 to \$15 more and the average stay has been cut to one-third.

Both Wonnacott and John A. Dare, president-elect of the Western Hospital Association, pointed out that in the two decade interim all costs have risen by close to 300 per cent.

But, they insisted, meanwhile, the need for rest and recuperation of women following childbirth has not fallen by two-thirds, and no argument about keeping the total cost of hospital stay unchanged will do to argue the mother into a proper state of mind about going back to her duties in three days.

CHANGE SUGGESTED.

A. A. Aita, past president of the association and administrator of the San Antonio Community Hospital in Upland, added his voice to Wonnacott's and suggested a basic change in pre-paid insurance coverage.

He and the others agreed that the maximum of maternity hospital coverage could be increased from \$50 to \$100 by increasing monthly premiums by no more than 50 cents.

Such a coverage would permit the average mother to stay in the hospital for close to ten days, which all of the administrators considered an ideal time.

"You ought to see the average doctor when his wife has a child," Wonnacott said. "He doesn't force her out in three or four days. He knows how much difference a few extra days mean."

DOCTORS ABSOLVED.

There was no inclination among the three men to blame doctors, however, since the



JOHN A. DARE
Elected Association President

nia—and the West in general—are behindhand in offering proper care.

This, Wonnacott said, is true of all phases of such insurance, but specifically so of maternity care, since most policies carry the flat \$50 amount.

He suggested that city hospitals could go a long way toward curing their low occupancy rates by shifting more beds to maternity.

CAMPAIGNS URGED.

But, he said—and the others backed him—the hospitals could do their best work by campaigning for more thorough maternity coverage by CPS and Blue Cross.

Some 4,000 hospital executives

and leaders in such allied fields as nursing, dietetics, physical therapy and anesthetics, will gather today for the session.

Delegates will come from California, eight other western states, British Columbia, Alaska and Hawaii.

Other speakers at today's opening meeting will include Vice Admiral Ross T. McIntire, former Navy surgeon general and onetime personal physician to President Roosevelt; George H. Wilson, president of the California Farm Bureau Federation, and Dr. Edwin L. Crosby, executive director of the American Hospital Association.