

work being done by the test development and research office of the school examination department of the University of London. Similar investigations in different subjects are obviously desirable, but will only be instigated if this first operation is considered to be a success.

## No Joy for Doctors

THE view that seems to be shared by the British medical and dental professions—that better pay would be a panacea—is strongly but tactfully contested in the latest report of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (HMSO, 6s. 3d.), published on May 7. This is the ninth report to appear since the review body was set up in March 1962 to act as mediator—and to some extent pacifier—between the professions and the Government.

It is in fact surprising that the professions have asked for more, because the seventh report of the review body, published only two years ago, recommended substantial increases, particularly for general medical practitioners, but also for hospital doctors at all levels. The value of distinction awards for consultants was also increased by approximately 8 per cent, and new net incomes were recommended for dentists. Although the Government decided for reasons of incomes policy to phase the implementation of the review body's recommendations on general medical practitioners, the other recommendations were accepted.

The doctors' representatives have proposed an increase of about 8 per cent for the period from April 1, 1968, to April 1, 1970. They suggest that this is necessary to take account of the rise in the cost of living since the seventh report came out, to reward increased responsibility and workload, and to recognize the manpower situation. They also point out that certain fees or allowances should be brought up to date.

The views of the health departments rarely agree with those of the professions, but the review body has done its best to hold the balance between the two. It therefore suggests that if general practitioners could be encouraged to have practices in relatively unpopular areas by increasing the present allowance by about £100 a year, this would probably be justified under the "manpower" criterion of the current incomes policy. It also considers that an increase in the allowance of £175 for pre-entry vocational training might be justified if this acted as an inducement. It proposes that the age limit for general medical practitioners should be increased to 72, provided that the health departments and the profession's representatives can work out a satisfactory method of establishing the continued ability of the individual. The review body does not agree with the profession's feeling that the fee for a night visit between midnight and 7 a.m. should be increased from the present value of £1 to £2 5s. and it dismisses the idea of introducing a new fee for night consultation at a doctor's surgery. As far as temporary arrangements for carrying on a practice are concerned, —for example, following the death or retirement of a general practitioner—the review body feels that this is something that should be worked out by the health departments and representatives of the medical profession, and should not simply be compensated for by financial reward.

The report recommends that from April 1, 1968, a

new scale for medical assistants and assistant dental surgeons beginning at £1,950 and rising by 14 annual increments to £3,525 should come into being. This represents an increase of 5.5–8.5 per cent over previous rates. It also recommends that the weekly or sessional rates for locums in these grades should be raised to £52 13s. a week or £4 16s. a "notional" half day to correspond with the new scale. Another positive recommendation is that the number, but not the value, of distinction awards for consultants should be increased from a total of 3,370 to 3,580. The review body agrees with the health departments that lectures to groups of hospital doctors and dentists should attract a fee (£5), but only when the lecture is outside the lecturer's own hospital group and in cases where the lecture has to be prepared substantially at home. Small increases in expense allowances for general practitioners are also proposed.

Although the recommendations in this rather negative report will probably disappoint many doctors, they are at least assured that the review body will "not hesitate to recommend an immediate general increase in remuneration" if at any time it considers this to be justified. One thing that is made clear, though, is that the medical and dental professions cannot expect preferential treatment, "and cannot escape the realities of the economic situation or the application of incomes policy".

## Preparing for the Eclipse

NOT only astronomers but also ophthalmologists are planning for the eclipse of the Sun on September 22. Although the eclipse will only be partial over Britain, it will undoubtedly be watched by many people, and the Ministry of Health is worried about possible damage to the eyes. Ophthalmologists say that solar eclipses are notorious for the damage they cause, and some time ago the Ministry of Health asked the Institute of Ophthalmology to suggest the best way of looking at the forthcoming event. Professor R. A. Weale at the institute has tackled the problem by estimating by how much the radiant energy from the Sun needs to be reduced to make it safely visible. He came to the conclusion that a filter of density 4.5, which passes one part in 30,000 of the incident energy, would be suitable. Presumably the Ministry of Health will make an announcement along these lines nearer the date of the eclipse; it will certainly want to discourage people from using potentially dangerous methods of looking at the Sun, such as imperfectly smoked glass or pinholes.

None of the phenomena associated with a total eclipse will be visible from Britain on September 22. Russian astronomers are more fortunate, however, in that the path of the total eclipse will pass across the USSR, east of the Ural Mountains, and preparations for the event are under way (*Nature*, 216, 950: 1967). The Russians seem to have been particularly enterprising during the total eclipse of February 1961, which passed over the Crimea. On that occasion Soviet scientists, using cloud seeding techniques, were able to disperse a continuous cloud cover at designated places so that the eclipse could be observed. They will presumably be prepared to do this again if weather conditions are unfavourable. British astronomers, on the other hand, will have to wait 30 years for the next