

and other on-site measurements, automatic weather stations are being set up. Measurements will be fed into a small computer to monitor the accuracy of the instruments and calculate the average values from the individual measurements, taken every half minute. Data will be recorded on a punched tape for analysis.

A new area of study is the physical and biological processes controlling evaporation from forests. Very little is now known of the process except that it is complicated, so the institute is setting up a detailed experiment in Thetford, Norfolk, where there is a very large forest planted in the early thirties and now reaching a height of 50 feet. Two instrument towers are being built to measure wind speed, air temperature and humidity at five heights, as well as radiation, leaf temperatures, soil moisture and rainfall. Because extensive work has already been done on evaporation from low vegetation—grass and arable crops—this new study will enable the situation in the catchment areas to be estimated from a combination of the two extremes.

Rose-coloured Syrup

THE complacency of the annual report of the Ministry of Health for 1967 (price 23s.) hardly seems justifiable in view of the many difficulties which have become apparent in many branches of the British Health Service. The indispensability of this service is self-evident, but, at the same time, it is equally obvious that a long hard look needs to be taken to see how its present functioning could be improved, for it is far from perfect.

According to the report, last year "saw progress on almost every front in the health services", and value for money was a chief consideration. Expenditure amounted to £1,358 million in the financial year which ended on March 31, 1967. This represented an increase over the previous financial year of £117 million and accounted for about one-ninth of total public expenditure by the central Government and local authorities. The total can be broken down in the following way:

Central administration	£7 million
Hospitals	£765 million
General medical	£97 million
Local Health Authority	£126 million
Pharmaceutical	£142 million
Others	£221 million

Following the increase in remuneration in 1966, no general improvements in remuneration for hospital medical and dental staff were made in 1967, but the number of distinction awards was increased. General practitioners were a little more fortunate, for a new system of remuneration was brought fully into operation on April 1, according to which payments are made for night visits, immunization, vaccination and so on. This new scheme, it is hoped, will increase the attractiveness of general practice as a career. Interest-free loans to doctors were discontinued on May 31 but a scheme was approved to assist general practitioners in the financing of practice premises (the General Practice Finance Corporation).

Not surprisingly, the number of prescriptions rose by 3.5 per cent compared with 1966, and the cost rose by 5.7 per cent. 1,539 doctors were visited by the ministry's Regional Medical Officers because of high prescribing costs. Baroness Serota was appointed

chairman of the new Health Education Council in November. Fourteen new health centres were opened as were 121 new homes for elderly people, providing accommodation for 5,322 residents.

The number of hospital beds available at December 31 was 467,447—a fall of 848 compared with the previous year. The number of patients treated in hospital, however, increased by 114,000. The report welcomes the relatively small increase of patients waiting for admission to hospital, but the waiting lists for surgical departments (415,513) and gynaecology (83,297) cannot really be regarded as satisfactory. In August the Government announced that it would make available the finance necessary to establish a new medical school at Southampton University, the need for which is emphasized by the fact that the provisional figure of 2,431 British-based students accepted for medical school in 1967 is only slightly higher than the number (2,312) in 1966.

Money for Booms

COMPENSATION of £3,200 has so far been paid by the Ministry of Technology for the damage caused by the four sonic boom tests carried out over London last summer with Lightning aircraft. The other seven tests over other parts of Britain cost just over £700 in compensation. The minister has promised a full report on the tests "shortly", which by all accounts means not before the next session of Parliament in October. Until the report appears, the number and details of the claims that have been settled are being withheld, but all were referred by the Ministry of Technology to the Claims Commission of the Ministry of Defence—a body with experience of and machinery for adjudicating and settling claims for damage resulting from military activities. With one exception, all the claims involved damage to property. The exception was a claim made by a woman from Hornchurch who suffered a partial loss of hearing as a result of a sonic boom and accepted £150 settlement.

Even before the tests, the British Government seems to have recognized that aircraft should not be allowed to fly at supersonic speeds over densely populated areas. On June 19 last year, for example, Lord Beswick told the House of Lords that the Concorde will not reach supersonic speeds until 100 miles after take-off. It seems inevitable that all supersonic flight over land will be prohibited, at least until a great deal more information on the effect of sonic booms has been collected. Last year's tests should not have had any influence on that decision. The Minister of Technology himself admitted their irrelevancy when he said on July 21 last year that the sonic booms heard in London during the tests were not comparable to those which could be expected from the Concorde. And eleven tests can hardly be said to have justified the ministry's much more modest claim that "we have achieved the object of informing people about the nature of a supersonic bang". In the United States, where much more extensive tests have been made, the National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council Committee on supersonic transport and the sonic boom concluded that with the currently available data it is just not possible accurately to assess the type and amount of damage that sonic booms can cause (see *Nature* 217, 1101; 1968). The makers of the Concorde certainly