A Mobile Consulting Room*

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From the North Western Gas Board

In an industry whose employees are scattered in small groups over a wide area medical examinations present a problem which does not arise in an industry with a large population in a small area. There are several possible ways of meeting this problem.

Examination centres can be set up at a small number of convenient points to which the employees can travel. This usually means the loss of half a day or a day's work in addition to travelling expenses.

Examination centres can be set up at each work place, either using accommodation intended for another purpose or using rooms specially built for the purpose at each place. The choice lies between unsatisfactory or costly consulting rooms. Examinations can be carried out by general practitioners at fees varying from 10s. to 3 guineas. The service given and the interest taken by general practitioners varies considerably, and while some make excellent industrial medical officers others do not.

A mobile examination centre overcomes many of these disadvantages. It can be used by a doctor who is fully conversant with the industry ensuring that medical examinations are done with the demands of the job and the health hazards of the industry in mind.

The mobile consulting room here described is used by the North Western Gas Board, which has 20,000 employees working in an area covering 4,000 square miles. The area extends from the Lake District to the southern border of Cheshire, and from Buxton across to the west coast.

In Manchester and Liverpool there are large enough concentrations of employees to justify the establishment of ordinary consulting rooms. A third consulting room and office is also sited near St. Helens. The more isolated industrial areas of Lancashire and Cheshire beyond a 10-mile radius of these three medical centres are served by the mobile unit.

The unit is used primarily for medical examinations, though it can also be used as a treatment centre. New entrants into the industry, employees returning to work after accident or serious illness, and employees needing special medical assessment, are examined in the unit.

This unit has proved well worth while during the two months it has been in use. Its special features are set out below :—

Vehicle.—This vehicle is an Austin 2-ton long wheel-base chassis, with special springing and large capacity,

and coach-type battery. The interior is 16 ft. $\times$ 7 ft. 6 in. The consulting room is 12 ft. $\times$ 7 ft. 6 in. and the two dressing rooms at the rear are each 3 ft. $\times$ 4 ft. The interior height, floor to ceiling, is 6 ft. 6 in.

Lighting.—The main lighting is derived from three fluorescent tubes operating from a battery or mains.

Heating.—Tubular radiators pass through the consulting room and also heat the dressing rooms. Hot water circulates from the engine cooling system and after about 20 minutes running remains hot for two to three hours. Additional heat comes from a gas convector/radiator fire.

Water Supply and Drainage.—A 10-gallon water storage tank is carried beneath the vehicle. An "ascot" instantaneous gas water heater provides warm, hot, or boiling water. A 15-gallon waste tank is also sited beneath the vehicle. These tanks are accessible from outside for filling and emptying.

Sink Unit.—A stainless steel sink unit 54 in. $\times$ 21 in. has the usual drainer and two sinks. One is 14 in. $\times$ 18 in. $\times$ 7 in. for ordinary use : the other smaller one (14 in. $\times$ 5 in. $\times$ 5 in.) is for the disposal of urine specimens. The drainer makes a useful instrument tray. Beneath the sink a "calor" gas cylinder is stored. Here also is the electric centrifugal water pump.

General Construction.—The body is double panelled and heat insulated, the outer panelling being aluminium alloy. The two rear doors, in appearance like ambulance doors, open each into a dressing room. Sliding doors separate the dressing rooms from the consulting room. These doors are so arranged that only one dressing room can communicate with the consulting room at one time. There is ample cupboard and storage space. The vehicle looks like a large motor ambulance. It is not too unwieldy to manoeuvre through some of the narrow streets of Lancashire into smaller gas works. At the same time it is of adequate size for the job.

Design.—The design was drawn up by the Chief Medical Officer and the Transport Officer of the North Western Gas Board. The bodywork was built by Messrs. Herbert Lomas Ltd., ambulance specialists, of Manchester.

Costs.—The cost of the vehicle including accessories was approximately £2,500. The running costs are estimated as £750 per annum.

Working Capacity.—On a basis of 20 patients per day and allowing for travelling time, the unit can deal easily with 5,000 patients per annum, using it five days per week. In actual use it is anticipated that about 4,000 patients a year will be seen in the unit.

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Mobile consulting room showing the two dressing rooms at the rear and the medical officer's room. [Photographs reproduced by courtesy of Messrs. Lookers Ltd., Manchester, 3.]

Sketch plan of interior of the mobile consulting room.