

£500,000 HOSPITAL EXTENSIONS

Minister Lays Foundation Stone

The Minister for Health, Mr. W. F. Sheahan, Q.C., L.L.B., M.L.A., said on Saturday that Federal and State authorities should combine with local communities to ensure that all hospitals were so equipped as to make it possible for every community to have the benefit of the great advances which had been made in techniques and skills as far as hospitalisation was concerned.

Mr. Sheahan officially set the foundation stone of the new extensions to the Gosford District Hospital which will cost, together with the necessary equipment an estimated £500,000.

The contract price for the actual building now in the course of erection is £421,000.

There was good attendance at Saturday's ceremony despite threatening rain.

The Chairman of the Gosford District Hospital Board of Directors, Mr. R. G. Mathews, presided over the proceedings which he opened with a thoughtful and well delivered address which touched on many aspects of hospitalisation.

The following excerpts from his address are particularly interesting:

"Today we are about to embark on a ceremony which shows in the form of bricks and mortar that this district has come of age. It has grown up. When a district reaches the stage where it justifies a full scale hospital with 130 beds, that district has indeed begun to flex its muscles and to say to the outside world, 'look here we are, we are a fully developed community'.

"As I look about me Mr. Minister, I see that the people of this district have come along in large

numbers to show how much this hospital and the current building programme means to them.

"The people of this district are very hospital conscious. They have gone for years in the knowledge that our meagre hospital facilities are inadequate.

"The people of this community know only too well, what it means in human terms to be hospitalised in Sydney or Newcastle or somewhere else away from home, away from friends and relatives.

"Anyone who has lain in a hospital bed without visitors knows only too well the loneliness and misery of lying there without the small pleasure of a visitor.

"These extensions mean to the local people that in most cases they can expect local treatment, near Mum and the kids, near friends, near home.

ONE OF 300

"This hospital is just one of over three hundred in New South Wales. This district represents only a small segment of this vast State. With immigration, the birth rate and increased longevity, the whole State is growing in size.

"The need for more and better hospitals is never-ending. We as sensible adults know you have a most difficult task. There is insufficient money available to meet all the demands made on you. It

is necessary of course to follow some kind of priority system. As fair and sensible people, we can only ask of you, sir, that you provide for us on a fair and equitable basis. We do not want to do better than some other area. We do not want to do worse than any other area.

"We thank you and the Commissioners of the Hospital Commission, for what has been done, and we appreciate that you have the fact and the figures readily available to see that this hospital continues to receive its just and fair share of the development funds as they become available.

"The town of Gosford of course is only a small part of this thriving district. If one were to judge our needs, by Gosford, he would be misled.

POPULATION

"This district is closely settled and tightly knit. In 1954 the population was 37,000. In 1963 the population had grown to 66,000 for Gosford and Wyong.

"There has been some growth in the past year, Mr. Minister, and I suggest the population figure for the district now exceeds 65,000. In ten years it is expected to be at least 106,000. Add this to the tourist upsurge. For almost half the year, the population exceeds double the permanent resident

"It is a fact sir, that this hospital receives a great number of cases from the tourist population. This means that our hospital bed allocation cannot be assessed on a permanent population figure alone. A sensible recognition of all sources of cases is necessary. It would be idle to emphasise the number of accident cases handled by this hospital. Our highway is well known and notorious.

"The new Expressway seems to have increased our business rather than decreased it. I suppose this has something to do with progress. In the immediate future the Expressway to Sydney will open. This must also have an effect on increasing population rate, perhaps also on our accident rate too.

"All in all sir, this community is poised for a further population explosion, and we at the hospital rightly feel that the hospital must quickly develop, beyond this present stage, in order to maintain the status quo.

MORE LAND FOR EXPANSION

"An inspection of the hospital grounds reveals that the hospital site is fast filling up, and we must look for more land as a means of expansion. Already, steps have been taken to negotiate with the Department of Army, for the purchase of six acres of ground they own immediately at the rear of this hospital. We believe that we have good reason to expect these negotiations will be successful.

"Within the hospital itself, there are sixty

nursing staff. We do not have any resident doctors. The average stay per patient is 6.5 days. This means that the turn-round of patients is much higher than is normal.

"In more specific terms, each bed in the hospital is occupied by 5 persons each month. There are only 65 beds. Most of the time there are more patients than beds. Stretchers, cots and other make-shift arrangements are used. Many patients have to be taken elsewhere for hospital care, because of the bed shortage.

"There are more than three cases taken away by ambulance to either Sydney or Newcastle every day of the year.

"What does this mean in terms of strain and stress on the staff. It means there are no quiet days, there are no catch-up times. It means a tired and overworked staff.

"We are indeed fortunate that we have a devoted staff to whom nothing is too much trouble. Perhaps there is a moral here, but this overworked staff have an extraordinary reputation for kindness and skill.

DISTRICT NURSES

"You are aware sir, that this hospital has the largest number of district nurses of any county.

(Continued on page 14)