

POULTICE ON CHILD

Asylum Death

Methods used in placing a plaster poultice on a girl inmate of the Kew Mental Hospital were criticised by the city coroner (Mr. Tingate, P.M.) yesterday.

He recorded a finding that Joan Leslie Brown, aged four years, died from shock following scalds when, by misadventure, an overheated plaster was placed on her chest.

"Obviously the tests said to be made by nurses to ascertain the heat of poultices are unsatisfactory," said Mr. Tingate. "I do not believe that a proper test was made here. In my opinion there was very great carelessness shown in the placing of the plaster on the child."

Mr. Roy Schilling, instructed by the Hospital and Officers' Federation of Australia, appeared for Nurse Catherine Sheehan, and Senior-detective W. J. Sloan assisted the coroner.

Doctors' Evidence

Dr. Stanley Jacob Cantor, of the Children's Cottage, Mental Hospital, Kew, said that on July 29 the girl became ill with an influenzal cold. On August 1 he ordered the application of poultices because of signs of pulmonary congestion. The last time he saw her alive was at 1 p.m. on August 2, when her condition appeared to be comfortable.

Dr. Cantor said that the child would have been able to express pain or discomfort by crying. Cross-examined by Mr. Schilling, he said that if the child was weakened by her illness the poultice might have been too hot, though it might not be for a child in normal health. As far as he could judge she was in normal health.

Dr. Clive Farran-Ridge, of the Mount Park Mental Hospital, said that a post-mortem examination showed no signs of bronchial pneumonia in the child, but it was possible that she had been suffering from bronchial pneumonia earlier, and that it had cleared up before the examination. Any illness would make her more susceptible to shock.

"It seems to me that the poultice must have been put on very hot," he said. "Otherwise it would not have caused the scalding which was observed."

Nurses in Box

Nurse Margaret Dolan said that she put a poultice on the child, under instructions from Dr. Cantor, at 9.45 a.m. on August 1.

Nurse Catherine Sheehan said that she renewed the poultice about 7.15 a.m. on August 2, under instructions given by the medical officer when she was on duty the previous evening.

"I did not warm the plaster in the tin, which is the usual practice, but spread it on the lint and placed it on the fire guard in front of the fire for a minute or two," said Nurse Sheehan. "I then tested it by placing it on the back of my hand, and then to my face. I was quite satisfied that it was not too warm to apply and applied it."

Questioned by Senior-Detective Sloan

it.
Questioned by Senior-Detective Sloan, Nurse Sheehan said that the child did not indicate at any time that she was uncomfortable. When witness was testing the poultice she held it to her face for about a minute. She had a doubt whether it would be warm enough, and no doubt about it being too warm.

To the coroner, Nurse Sheehan said that she had not warmed a poultice on the fire guard before. The back of the hand was the test nurses were told to use for testing poultices when they were doing their examinations. When she changed the poultices she saw no blisters on the child.