

DEATH BY SCALDING

Coroner Criticises Poultrice Application

The City Coroner (Mr. Tinkate, P.M.), when announcing a finding of misadventure at the inquest yesterday into the death of Joan Lealey Brown, 3 years, an inmate of the Children's Cottage Mental Hospital, Kew, said he believed the usual tests to determine the heat of the poultice were not made, and that great carelessness had been shown.

Dr. Stanley Jacob Cantor, attached to the Kew Mental Hospital, said the child was admitted to the female ward on May 28, and on July 29 became ill. On August 1 he ordered applications of a poultice. At the post-mortem examination he saw blisters, apparently due to scalds, on the front of the chest.

Nurse Margaret Dolan said she placed a poultice on the child's chest and back, and was satisfied that it was not too hot.

Nurse Catherine Sheehan said the child's temperature was 105 deg. when she went on duty at 7 a.m. on August 2. As the poultice required renewing, she prepared another by heating it on the fireguard in front of the fire for a few minutes. To test the heat of the poultice she placed it on the back of her hand and then to her face. Satisfied that it was not too warm, she then applied it to the child, who showed no signs of discomfort. During her 21 years' nursing experience this was the first time she had warmed the poultice at the fireguard.

Nurse Lillian Lattimer said when she removed the poultice from the child after it had died at 12.30 a.m. on August 3 she noticed redness and a few blisters on the chest, but none on the back. Had she seen the blisters she would have thought them very serious.

Matron Mary McEvoy said the usual way to heat a poultice was to put it into a tin of hot water and heat it under a gas grill. Putting the poultice against the arm or face was the usual test of heat.

Dr. Clive Farrar-Ridge, pathologist of the Mental Hygiene department, who conducted the post mortem, said he found no signs of bronchial pneumonia, although it could possibly have cleared up before the post mortem. The child died from shock following scalding.

In answer to questions by Mr. R. Schilling (who appeared on behalf of the Hospital Employees' Federation, which watched the interests of Nurse Sheehan), Dr. Farrar-Ridge said that had the child suffered from a bronchial-pneumonia condition it would have been more susceptible to shock.

To the Coroner: The back of the hand was the most satisfactory place to test a poultice.