

Doctor urges end to planning for after the bomb

By Andrew Veitch.

COMMUNITY doctors belonging to the British Medical Association are to be urged to take no further part in planning for the aftermath of a nuclear attack. The call will affect most of those responsible for preparing to deal with a war.

The chairman of the BMA community medicine committee, Dr Stuart Horner, will make the call in the BMA's official newspaper next month.

If his committee approves, a motion recommending doctors to cooperate with the plans will go before the

BMA's annual meeting in July.

Dr Horner, one of the authors of the BMA report on the medical effects of a nuclear attack, will argue that Government plans are hopelessly inadequate, and that basic survival training would be more useful.

As community physician for Croydon, Dr Horner is responsible for war planning in the district, but has decided to take no further part in planning to implement those plans he has drawn up.

"Nuclear planning for health services in Croydon has been suspended," he said.

Earlier, in an interview with a local newspaper, Dr Horner said: "In the devastation which would follow even one substantial bomb on London, we would be left with virtually no drinking water or drugs and with at least half the population killed outright. I am very doubtful whether the plans I have drawn up would be of any value at all."

A leading article in yesterday's edition of the British Medical Journal, says: "In realistic terms, no rational plans can be made for coping with a nuclear attack.

A single megaton bomb on London would over-

whelm the country's medical services. An attack of 200 megatons or more, exploded simultaneously over the whole country, "would leave an unbridgeable gap between the millions of casualties (and tens of millions of dead) and the few surviving doctors with serviceable hospitals."

Non-cooperation by community doctors would destroy the Department of Health's war plans which have already cost the health service £500,000. Last year the ministers took that amount out of the health service budget and told regional authorities they would have to spend it on

appointing "home defence planners." All the authorities have now complied.

A Department of Health spokesman said yesterday: "The plans generated by the NHS are designed to make some provision for the casualties of war both conventional and nuclear. It is accepted that a nuclear attack on this country could produce casualties and damage on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

"However, we are certain that there would be survivors, and humanitarian concern demands that we should plan to care for them as far as possible."

Among the predictions in the report is that Britain could face attack in the order of 200 megatons or greater.

Later Mr Grabham said that the BMA was ready to offer advice to the Government on bridging the gap between its current thinking and the situation predicted in the board of science report. The BMA would be looking at ways of making summaries of the report widely available, with the possibility of distributing them through schools and doctors' waiting rooms.

Scots Professor Jimmy Payne, an anaesthetist in London, protested: "We have taken a stance on seat belts and on smoking, but the conference agreed on a stance on the most important issue of the day."

But it agreed that to take a view on the merits of how best to avoid such a catastrophe, whether by unilateral or multilateral disarmament or by maintaining a deterrent, all of which had advocates, would reduce its credibility.

"We speak with unchallenged authority on medical matters. We tread on dangerous ground when we step beyond that," Mr Grabham told his colleagues.

The accepted view was that the BMA had done its job in providing the facts in the board of science report, to enable individual members of the public to make their own decisions.

Attempts to align the association one way or another on the question of disarmament failed to get off the ground. A first strike by representatives from St Marylebone, recommending that the association take no political stance, wiped out a whole series of motions calling for a weapons freeze or multilateral disarmament; only one went so far as to "not rule out" the possibility of unilateral disarmament.

However, the chairman of the BMA council, Mr Tony Grabham, pointed out that a nuclear attack might not be all out. There could be a one-off "demonstration" attack which would be able to give even pure fantasy to imagine these would probably be tens of millions of casualties," said Dr Allison Hill of West Berkshire. "It is not a nuclear attack."

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"The Medical Effects of Nuclear War" is now on sale as a paperback, many members doubted whether there would be a health service at all.

However, the conference rejected the idea that planning for the event was a complete waste of time. It passed a resolution deploring the possibility of nuclear warfare, but stating that the medical profession should be actively involved in the contingency planning for survival afterwards.

"In the light of the board of science report, basic planning assumptions for health services are unsound and current departmental guidance is inappropriate to deal with such a catastrophe; therefore, this

meeting urges the Government to produce realistic plans to deal with a nuclear attack in order to meet these criticisms."

There were those who felt that the resources required to make such preparations meaningful would be better spent on the health service now.

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Doctors attack nuclear war aftermath guidance as fantasy

By ALAN MacDERMID

CURRENT Government guidance for the aftermath of a nuclear war was dismissed as worthless by the country's doctors yesterday. "Delusion" and "fantasy" were some of the descriptions used by representatives at the British Medical Association's annual conference in Dundee.

Their targets included the official pamphlet "Protect and Survive" of white-washed windows fame, and the more detailed home defence circular (77)1, outlining the organisation of the National Health Service after a holocaust.

Armed with the conclusions of their own board of science, whose report

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