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THE COMPULSORY NOTIFICATION OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

The question of the compulsory notification of infectious diseases to local authorities is one which is becoming of much interest to sanitarians in this country, and the following extracts from a paper on it by A. M. Anderson, M.D., medical officer of health for the burgh of Dundee, Scotland, will be interesting and useful.

The writer says :—I propose, in this paper, to place before you the history and development of the question, without exaggeration or suppression, and to give a brief account of our experience of the system which is now law in Dundee.

I believe this question began to be publicly discussed in 1876. Local Authorities experienced great difficulty in dealing with epidemics of the chief infectious diseases, and this general experience led to suggestions which it was hoped might overcome the difficulty. At first, attention was mainly directed to the householder, or person in charge of the infected patient, and, either by Police Bye-laws or otherwise, powers were obtained in several districts to compel the householder to notify. A little experience soon convinced the authorities that the object aimed at—viz., early and accurate information as to the presence and locality of infection, could not be satisfactorily obtained in every instance by this method. For, while the more intelligent portion of the public generally reported, the very poor and destitute, small shopkeepers and others, delayed or evaded reporting. In Greenock, during a period of four years and four months, the total number of cases known to the authority was 4 423, and of these the householders reported only a percentage of 55.52. The medical practitioners agreed to report voluntarily, and the total number so reported amounted to 106.