Until recently statistics had shown that cancer was increasing in New Zealand and tuberculosis diminishing, but as the result of the war mainly, the unpleasant fact is now revealed that tuberculosis is again in the ascendant. The official figures for 1916 are 850, and 1,521 for the year 1917, the increase being largely due to cases among returned soldiers. Up to 31st January of this year 15,623 soldiers had returned to New Zealand. The number of phthisis cases among these men, including cases which had developed after the arrival of the men in New Zealand, was 593, and of these 492 had developed the disease before return to this country, and the others—that is, about 20 per cent.—had contracted it apparently after arrival. Forty-two deaths had occurred up to the date mentioned. The belief that once prevailed that native-born New Zealanders are not so liable to phthisis as persons born in the United Kingdom cannot be upheld. It is true that the death-rate from tuberculosis in England and Wales is 1.34, and for New Zealand .76; but, on the other hand of 544 persons certified as having died from phthisis in New Zealand in 1914, 341 were born in New Zealand, and 92 were born elsewhere but had lived in this country for fifteen years or more. It is not surprising that the hardships of war should give rise to an increase of tuberculosis, and we should also expect an increased incidence among returned soldiers as compared with the civilian population.
The matter is one for the action of the Health Department, and it will not permit of delay. It also concerns very much the medical profession, whose business likewise it is to see that phthisical soldiers do not become a menace to the rest of the population. These soldiers deserve, and will get, the best treatment that is available. The Minister of Public Health announces that one or more sanatoria are to be built. We hope they will be erected in the cheap, simple, and efficient style that has been found satisfactory in other countries. The consensus of opinion is that consumptive sanatoria have by no means fulfilled the high hopes that they once inspired, and that they are a greater benefit to the community at large than to the patients.

In the general scheme of coping with consumption, housing is of first importance, and it is a painful thought that here in this new land slum conditions are present in the larger towns, and nothing very perceptible is done to abate the evil. We are geographically more favourably situated than most parts of Europe. Invercargill is in about the same latitude in the south as Lausanne is in the north; similarly, Wellington corresponds to Barcelona, and Christchurch to Marseilles. New Zealand has one of the lowest, if not the very lowest death-rate in the world, being slightly above 9 per 1,000. The rates for other countries are: United States 13.6, England 14, Scotland 15.5, Germany 15, France 19.6, Ceylon 32, and Australia 10.5.

Our pride in this, however, should be limited by consideration of the fact that our birth-rate is much below what it should be, and that the death-rate in the garden cities in England is only 6 per 1,000. This latter fact shows what could be done by a proper system of town-planning in New Zealand.

Smokeless cities in New Zealand should be easily possible by transmitting the great water-power of the country into electricity. “In America they are making hard concrete roads far quicker than we make them, far more lasting, more efficient, and at a great saving in expense.” The abolition of slums and these other questions are of primary importance in the prevention of tuberculosis and other diseases, and they come well within the province of the medical profession. With questions of morality we are told now by many of our leaders that we have no concern, and if that be so we are no better than veterinarians, and no doctor should consider that page of the New Zealand Official Year Book for 1915, where it is shown that out of a total number in 1915 of 3,870 legitimate first births within one year after marriage, 2,023 of these births were the fruit of marriages of a duration less than nine months, and during the same year there were 1,137 illegitimate births in addition. In face of these figures all we have to do, according to the medical authorities who say we have no concern with morality, is to bury our heads, ostrich-like, in the sand.