

US Government Health Activities

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Complete refutation of the claim that the government does not concern itself with the loss from preventable disease is contained in the annual report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service submitted to Congress recently. Activities ranging from the prevention and cure of blindness, scientific studies of pellagra, the protection of the health of industrial workers, the prevention of the introduction of typhus fever, investigations of child labor and health insurance, the eradication of communicable disease and the control of the pollution of navigable streams, are recorded and demonstrate conclusively that the national government is vitally concerned in the health of its citizens.

The most striking achievement of the year relates to pellagra, an affliction which in certain states destroys more lives than tuberculosis. Pellagra is no longer a disease of mystery as the Public Health Service has clearly shown that it is caused by a restricted diet and that it may be prevented and cured by means of a properly balanced ration. The practical application of this knowledge has already resulted in a material reduction in the prevalence of this affliction in all parts of the country ...

... In eradication of trachoma, a contagious disease of the eyes frequently terminating in blindness, such marked success has been obtained that the methods followed, the converting of private residences into small hospitals and the holding of free open air clinics, have been adopted by the Egyptian government. During the year 1,700 persons were operated upon for the relief of partial or complete blindness, nearly 2,000 received hospital treatment, while more than 19,000 were treated at hospital dispensaries and clinics. When it is realized that large proportion of these people were doomed to years of suffering terminating in at least partial blindness and that they may have been restored to lives of usefulness, in some instances even being taken from county poorhouses where they had been public charges for the greater portion of their days, the importance of this most beneficent work can be imagined...

... Increased interest was shown by the government in the health of rural dwellers and Congress has recognized, by making an appropriation for studies in rural sanitation, that the welfare of the country resident is not to be neglected. During the past three years 80,270 homes in 15 different counties of 13 states were visited and complete sanitary surveys made of the premises. In every instance definite recommendations were given to remedy such evils as existed, as for example the pollution of wells, the presence of disease bearing insects and the improper disposal of excreta. In addition, 22,234 homes were revisited, mostly at the request of the owners, in order that the government agents could inspect the improve-

ments instituted. Wherever this method of bringing the lessons of sanitation directly to the rural dweller has been followed, a marked reduction has been observed in the prevalence of typhoid fever, hookworm, malaria and other preventable diseases.

Attention has also been given to the health of children of the nation, more especially to rural school children. Over 32,000 children attending the public school were examined during the year in order to determine their mental retardation and deficiency. In addition, 7,000 physical examinations were completed for the determination of physical defects.

The health of industrial workers has been safeguarded to a greater extent than at any time in the past. Studies have been made of the occupational hazards of steel workers in many of the leading industrial establishments of the country and insanitary and harmful condition corrected. In the zinc mines of Missouri methods have been adopted which should go far toward eradicating tuberculosis from that district. Investigations of child labor and of health insurance have also been made.

What is regarded as the largest and most important single undertaking of this nature yet inaugurated, the investigation of the pollution of the Ohio River, is still in progress. Surveys of the Atlantic Coast and New England watersheds have, however, been completed and the extent and effects of their pollution is now known; this knowledge demonstrates that Federal legislation to prevent the contamination of water sources is a necessity.

Better provision for the health of travelers has been obtained by safeguarding the water supplies of common carriers and through the promulgation of regulations governing the transportation of persons suffering from communicable diseases.

Energetic efforts have been made to prevent the introduction of all communicable diseases and to control those already with us. Typhus fever has been combated at all points on the Mexican border and disinfection plants established where the clothing and persons of all incoming aliens have been disinfected. At one station alone, El Paso, Texas, 26,000 persons were inspected and treated in such a manner as to insure their freedom from this highly fatal infection...

In only a single field, the medical inspection of immigrants, has the work of the Public Health Service shown any diminution during the year but this has been compensated for by the more thorough examination accorded. 481,270 aliens were examined for the purpose of determining physical and mental defects. Of these, 16,327 were certified for deportation, proportionately a greater number than has ever been recorded. The percentage of mental defectives certified is also steadily increasing.

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