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Want Ads

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EDWARD M'KERNON ADDRESSES MEET

Tells How Health Officer Can Use Newspaper for Educational News

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N. Y., June 28 (AP)—Newspaper readers are done with the bunk of yesterday and they look to science, not to magic, for their maximum well-being and enjoyment of life, Edward McKernon, superintendent of the eastern division of The Associated Press, today told the annual conference of health officers and public health nurses.

Speaking on the subject of how the health officer can use the newspaper for the dissemination of health news, Mr. McKernon said the masses "look to you of medicine for that public health without which no nation can long endure."

"You cannot overlake disease but you can head off that which threatens. You can't treat the millions but you can teach the millions to treat themselves. Here are the people. In the press we offer you the only medium through which they can be consistently reached."

Approach Press in Name of News

Mr. McKernon urged the health officers to approach the press in the name of news.

"That is your only claim to space in the strictly news column," he continued. "Honest news walks in the front door of the newspaper shop and is welcomed by the editor. Subtle propaganda climbs up the fire escape and is thrown out the window. It must be so.

"When you board a train you expect to travel in the direction that the train takes, but every intelligently conducted railroad welcomes suggestions for the improvement of the service. When you board the newspaper train, don't try to take charge of it but have faith in the experience of those who have struggled with the exigencies of publication. At the same time I am sure that you will find the editors will gratefully accept any suggestion that appears constructive. Your object is the same: to reach and interest the public. You can learn much from those whose livelihood depends upon just that thing.

"There are a few practical considerations that suggest themselves. Every health officer should have a heart-to-heart talk with the local editor looking to close cooperation. Enlist the aid of the executive secretary of your local tuberculosis and health committee. Ask these volunteers to prepare news stories to be submitted to you for approval before publication. I am sure you will find them eager to help.

"Do not exploit yourself. Exploit the news. Do not label every story that originates with you with your name. Occasional official statements issued by you will be good, but generally speaking make your stories impersonal.

"Get the reporter working for you by giving him tips on stories. Tell the reporter that there is a story in the health menacing dump in the north end of the city. Tell him why there is news in that situation. Help them to be technically correct in their stories, but do not be too fussy about having them use just the phraseology that you would use. You cannot write news in the Latin of medical prescriptions. You must write in the language that the newspaper readers will understand.

See Bright Side

"Try to see the brighter side of your work. Make your stories cheerful. Emphasize no death with depressing statistics, but stress the joy of life. Let sunshine radiate from the office of the health commission. Throw a scare into the community now and then if it seems necessary, but remember that newspaper readers shrink from the unpleasant. Accomplish the thing you have in mind by telling them how they can live long and get the maximum happiness out of life. When all is said and done, that is what they wish to know.

"These are practical considerations offered for what they may be worth. But now I wish to go a little deeper into the essentials of medical publicity, having in mind the profession as a whole. If you hope for successful publicity you must first sell yourselves on the idea of publicity. The profession of medicine is the most poorly advertised of professions, and this because it never has been sold on the subject of publicity. On the contrary it has assumed an attitude of something like aloofness toward the press. I express no opinion as to the reaction of the press to this attitude, but in a totally professional diagnosis of the case I get the impression that there is a feeling that in the past the profession of medicine has rather high-hatted the profession of journalism and you know how popular high hats are in newspaper row.

Never Wholly Frank

The medical profession never has been wholly frank with the press. One might think illness was regarded either as something sacred or something of which to be ashamed. When the president of the United States speaks we hang on his every word. If he travels we wish to know all about where he goes and what he sees. Is he on vacation? We must learn the size of the trout he had for breakfast. All quite right and proper. He is our president and we are interested in all that concerns him. But let him fall ill and suddenly he is encompassed with a professional silence as impenetrable as the reason for it. The physicians pussyfoot. The nurses pussyfoot. The servants pussyfoot, and even the reporters get to pussyfooting in the highly charged professional atmosphere. As a result the public which may be wrought up to a high pitch of excitment receives such illuminating reports as these:

At 2:01 p. m. Dr. Blank came out of the sick room looking grave.

At 2:02 p. m. Dr. Blank returned to the sick room still looking grave.

"A recent concession to popular interest in the condition of an outstanding personage who has been quarantined from the press is the practice of issuing official bulletins at fixed intervals of the day and night. These are good so far as they go, but they do not go very far. Sometimes the names signed to the bulletins take up more newspaper space than the bulletins themselves. The bulletins tell us that at a certain hour the patient's pulse was 80; respiration 32; and temperature 100. All of which means much to the profession but little, or nothing to the general public. Now if they would tell us that at midnight the sick man awakened and asked for a ham sandwich, we who have been ill and experienced the sense of returning appetite, would know that the patient was better.

Have Right to Know

"Now there is a very serious side to all this. The millions of this country want to know what's what and they have a right to know. The newspapers do the best they can to tell them, but in my opinion the poorest reporting that is done is that dealing with sickness.

"In recent years, however there has been a distinct improvement. Today, I think, the profession is trying to cooperate with the press and the newspapers are giving more careful attention to medical matters.

"It all goes back to this: We of the press and you of medicine must arouse ourselves to a sense of profound responsibility to the public. We are natural allies and should work in the closest cooperation for I solemnly believe that the destinies of the nation and the triumph or collapse of modern civilization will rest more on the character of the two professions represented here today than on any other human agency.

"Sanity and sanitation; in these will be found the promise for the future. Healthy minds and healthy bodies are fundamentals of democracy. The responsibility is shared about equally by the profession of journalism and the science of medicine.

"The sanity of the world depends upon the sanity of the press. If newspaper editors generally lose their sense of proportion, their readers will go mad. Society sees itself in the news columns, and the serious thing about it is that it believes what it sees. If the daily picture is constantly falsified—trivialties made to appear important, the exceptional as the rule; credence given to every elusive rumor and fact confused with speculation—the vision of the public is bound to be distorted. In such circumstance there never can be a sane public opinion and without this democracy cannot survive.

Must Know Facts

"We must know the facts of life. The woods are full of those who are everlastingly telling us what we ought to be. The supreme mission of journalism is to tell us what we are. For it is only through an understanding of himself and of human nature and of the necessities of community existence, that the individual may hope to comprehend the advantages to life of popular government and adapt himself to it.

"It is the conviction that the sanity of society depends upon the sanity of the press that impels the more than 1,200 daily newspapers engaged in the cooperative effort of The Associated Press to maintain in these days of so much yellow publicity a news report that is non-partisan honest and decent and to invite the cooperation to this end of every profession that

"Aye, Aye, Sir!"

Vice Admiral Henry Wiley (above), a native of Alabama, has been designated next commander in chief of the United States fleet, to succeed Admiral Charles F. Hughes. Admiral Hughes has held the command for two years, and has been promoted to chief of naval operations at Washington.

Boy Is Killed By Automobile

SALEM, Ore., June 29 (AP)—Bede Berning, 7-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Otto Berning, of Gervais, was killed near that place on the Pacific highway late yesterday when he was run over by an automobile driven by R. G. Simmons, a salesman of Salem. Witnesses say that in trying to keep from hitting the child Simmons ran his car into the ditch, and that the boy ran from behind another car and in front of the Simmons car.

Simmons stopped another passing car and was driven to Woodburn where he notified officials. An inquest is to be held.

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