

Basic Financial State Support Needed Locally, Dr. Merkel Says

Editor's note: The following article written by Dr. A. Erin Merkel, Jackson county public health officer, appeared in the October issue of the Oregon Health Bulletin, published by the Oregon state board of health. The special issue was prepared through the cooperation of Oregon's local health department staff members to acquaint readers with the current status, problems and needs of community health programs. Dr. Merkel's article appears here in full from the Oregon Health Bulletin.

By DR. A. ERIN MERKEL
"I have been with the Jackson County Health Department for 21 years. Many changes have taken place in public health during this period—both in concepts of public health and in actual services given to the citizens of this health jurisdiction."

"About 18 years of the period has been characterized by rapid growth. From 1940-1945 we experienced an unusual growth due to an Army cantonment adjacent to Medford with about 35,000 troops. This period was one of crowded living conditions plus many demands for extra health services, for army personnel dependents. However, we were able to cope with most of the situations as they arose. Noteworthy was the fact that Camp White had the record of less man days lost due to V.D. than any other camp in the U.S. The only real threat occurred during 1942 when an epidemic of meningococcal meningitis broke out among the troops and there were also 17 cases among civilians—one resulting in death."

Population Increase
"Since the war years Jackson county has experienced a rapid population increase. In fact, it has more than doubled since 1940. In common with all parts of Oregon, where fast growth has taken place without proper planning and control, we have many health problems. City fringe areas have needed much attention due to improper sewage disposal and pollution of private water supplies."

"Many needed changes have been made through legislation during the past 20 years to give us better local control over such matters as restaurant sanitation, tourist facilities, city fringe areas, sewage problems, etc. However, as a result of such added responsibilities we are faced with the problem of adequate budgeting and health department staffing. This, no doubt, is a critical problem facing every health department in Oregon. With one exception, every health department in this state still falls considerably short of a \$2 per capita budget which is considered a minimum to furnish only the basic health services in a given community. A partial solution can be simply stated: that the local health departments need basic financial state support, similar to our present basic school support, road and other similar services receiving some state assistance."

Still Has Unmet Needs
"This county still has many unmet, or at best only partially met, needs in the various fields of health. By state law the county health department has the responsibility of 'enforcing the health and sanitary laws of the state and conducting other activities for the preservation of health or the prevention of disease.'"

"In recent years much has been said about mental health being America's leading public health problem. In Jackson county we are only reaching the most urgent need in this field, through our Child Guidance Clinic, as our facilities are meager and our staff small. In this clinic we are offering limited services to children in the 6-16 age group, thus leaving the rest of the population untouched, except for a limited service in follow-up care by public health nurses to State Hospital discharged patients. At present the community is asking for broadened services in mental health for adults and in the pre-school age child and especially for adult counseling in such matters as family problems, marriage and alcoholism. Until we can foresee a budgeting solution, our activities in this field will have to remain limited."

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"I feel that there is also a joint county and state responsibility in the field of tuberculosis control. The actual treatment of most tubercular persons is being shared by Jackson county in cooperation with the State Tuberculosis Hospital. Most new cases are admitted to the state facility for complete evaluation and for treatment until the patient can safely return to his home and family. The county health department continues the anti-microbial drug therapy to its recommended completion. Many of these cases do not have financial resources for private medical care. To do an adequate job on this follow-up treatment and care program, the local health department needs strengthening of its facilities, personnel and budget. This type of program, I believe, is sound, as it will shorten the over-all patient days in the State Tuberculosis Hospitals and save the taxpayers money in the long run."

Sanitation Field
"The field of sanitation also presents many problems as mentioned before. Rapid growth has taken place in this county and seems to continue. Better sanitation which protects our streams and lakes, better housing control, better vector control and all other sanitary control not only benefits the local communities, but is of benefit to Oregon as a whole. Much has been accomplished in this field in the past 20 years, both in new services and in staff. However, we are only able to meet the most urgent problems due to a lack of adequate budget and a minimum of staff."

"Our aging population creates many new problems in the field of public health. The cardiacs, diabetics, nephritics,

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arthritis and debilitated are asking for public health nursing services which we are unable to supply. However, to make these individuals productive within their capacities and more comfortable, we feel much more could be done in the field of counseling, education and direct service."

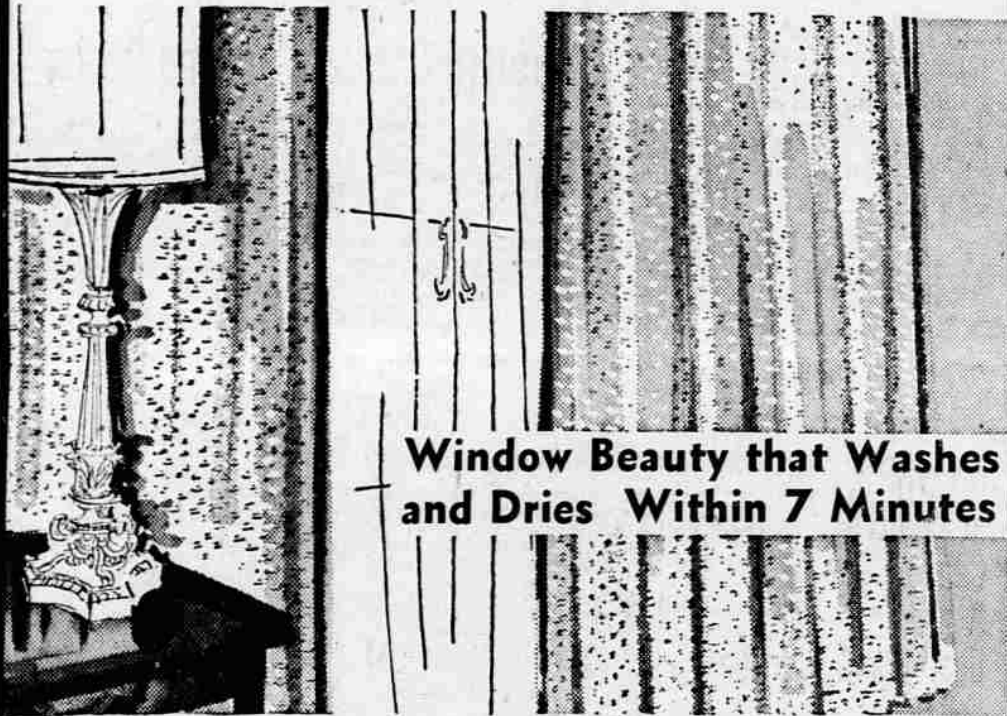
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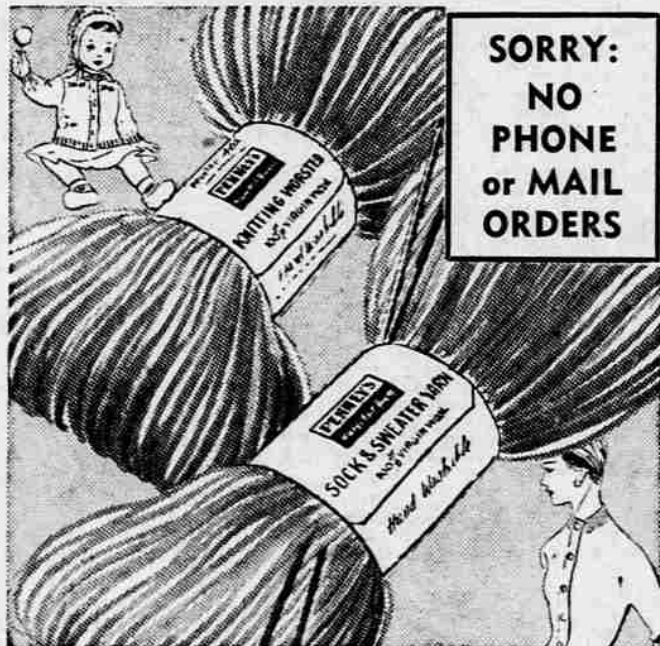
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