

Organization, Duties of Health Departments Told By County Medical Agent

By DR. PETER ROZENDAL

The organization, character of duties, and scope of limitations of the powers of health departments are dependent upon the government of which it is a part. Government in its relationships and policies reflects existing social philosophy; and the latter, in turn, is the current outcome of tradition, history, race, aspirations—the mores of the people concerned.

In the early days of development of county health work, and up to about 1925, public health administrators and the public were quite satisfied—too much so in fact, with a mere nucleus health service. This is not surprising. The idea that a group of workers should give all their time to the public health problems of a county was a new thing. Public officials and the medical profession had been accustomed to thinking of health activities as procedures temporary in nature, not to be called into play except in the face of epidemics and in those circumstances strength of shotgun quarantine had always secured more points and was certainly more dramatic than anything that could be done by the community physician.

Today when one refers to rural health units or county health departments, he has in mind a group of persons made up of one or more doctors, a sanitarian or sanitary engineer, one or more public health nurses, and a clerk, or clerks. Probably the two influences most responsible for the early development of full-time county health service were the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission and the United States Public Health Service. Health and sanitary problems created by suburban settlements perhaps served to hasten development.

The problems of sanitation arose and persisted largely because of man's tendency to form fixed abodes. The moment families congregated to form clans, and clans to form tribes, in like proportion would communal living tend to become permanent; and the larger the family or clan and the more fixed the abode, the greater was the accumulation of rubbish, waste and excreta, and the more intense was the pollution of the water supply. This is the ancestor of the village, the small town, and the metropolitan center.

As long as these various elements remain in balance, diseases which might be spread through insanitary conditions tend to remain at fairly low epidemic level. But upset this balance in either direction, and one of two things is likely to occur:

either there is an increased prevalence, or the epidemic level sinks to a new low. Thus it is possible for sanitation so to eliminate the dangers of communal living, or so to prevent or neutralize channels of infectivity, that year by year these diseases become more infrequent. Sanitation is the prevention of disease by eliminating or controlling the environmental factors which may form links in the chain of transmission. These environmental factors include milk, food and water supplies, wastes, insect carriers, housing, drainage and many others. These involve problems which may be considered the specialty of the sanitarian or sanitary engineer.

Klamath county is fortunate in having a recognized laboratory in which establishment of the actual presence of disease, detection of carriers, and analyses of water, milk and foods are made.

The county sanitarian or sanitary engineer work under the direction of the county health officer. Advice and consultation are received from the health officer in the division of sanitary engineering of the state board of health. The work program pertaining to sanitation consists of: public and private water supplies, sewage disposal—public and private systems—school sanitation and hygiene, in which is an inspection of the water supply, sewage disposal, ventilation, heating, lighting, construction of buildings, milk supply and swimming pools. Inspections are also made of tourist and trailer camps, picnic parks, industrial and agricultural camps as to compliance with the state law and rules and regulations of the state board of health. At the request of the county health officer, food establishments, restaurants, dairy and milk plants, and nuisance complaints are investigated. Inspections as to compliance with the state plumbing code are also

among the duties of the sanitarian or sanitary engineer.

In summing up, your county health department functions are: to provide a safe and adequate water supply, suitable disposal of human wastes, safe and adequate food supply, disposal of garbage and refuse, the control of intermediate sources of disease transmission, the cleaning up of the environment, such as the abatement of public health nuisances, and lastly, but not least, the education of the individuals of a community in personal and community hygiene. It has been said that "no subject is more intimately connected with the happiness and prosperity of a people than the degree of public health that they enjoy."

During the winter, planes from the U. S. Coast guard conducted an aerial ice survey in cooperation with icebreakers on the Hudson river. The planes dropped lead-filled "bombs" on the ice from an altitude of 500 feet. If the ice broke, it was thin enough for ships to pass.

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WASHINGTON, D.C., June 21 (U.P.) — Rep. Frank R. Havenner, (D-Calif.), Thursday night announced the navy department has decided on a greatly expanded shipbuilding program for California and the Pacific coast. Havenner said Admiral Samuel M. Robinson, chief of the

navy bureau of ships, had told him a large expansion was planned at Bethlehem Steel company's Union Iron works at San Francisco and that the Alameda plant across the bay would be reopened immediately for emergency defense program contracts.

The Los Angeles Shipbuilding company is to be expanded also, Havenner said, as probably will be the shipbuilding works at Hunters Point, San Francisco bay. In addition, he was told by the navy, the Todd plant at

Seattle will be expanded at once. The navy department has an appropriation for the purchase of the Hunters Point plant over a three-year period, and Havenner said indications were that this would be hastened. The Bethlehem company has agreed, he explained, to build a new drydock as soon as the government takes over its existing facilities.

A highway maintenance truck carrying three electro magnets recently picked up more than 5000 pounds of nails, screws and other bits of metal in one

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