

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE OF DISTRICT MEDICAL INSPECTORS OF PORTO RICO

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The conference of District Medical Inspectors which was held recently by the Department of Health of Porto Rico was a great success. It was the means of bringing together the leading officials of the Department, making it possible for them to study and acquire additional information on public-health matters.

The first session was held at the Administration Building of the new Leprosarium, which is ideally situated a few miles from San Juan. The opening address was made by the Commissioner of Health, Dr. Pedro N. Ortiz, who spoke about the development of the Department of Health of Porto Rico and its rapid evolution in recent years. "The evolution", he said "of ideas and science has made it necessary that the state organizations which are entrusted with public-health interests should find ways and means to bring about better public-health conditions by establishing first, and foremost, preventive measures; by paying as much attention to the individual himself as well as to the conditions under which he lives." "Our Department of Health" said Dr. Ortiz, "is at the present time a complete organization. It is not only effecting strict vigilance over sanitary conditions but it has amplified its radius of activity to such a degree that it now includes social prophylaxis". He made special reference to the campaign which is now being carried on to insure pure milk to the consumer. "As soon as this condition shall have been obtained," said Dr. Ortiz "we shall see the curve of infant mortality descend and at the same time the general mortality rate reduced". "This should be accomplished for the sake of our children who have a right to pure food", he added.

The Commissioner of Health closed his address with an urgent appeal to the department chiefs and medical inspectors to raise the moral status of the personnel with whom they are working and to bear in mind, in their contact with the public, the latin precept: "*suaviter in modo, fortiter in re.*"

The leading address of the afternoon session was made by Dr. Antonio Fernós Isern, Assistant Commissioner of Health, who spoke on County Health Work and Epidemiology. In a most interesting way he outlined a plan by which county health units might be suc-

essfully organized throughout Porto Rico: by uniting the various services of the Department in each municipality under one county health officer, with local authority vested in him. This system was given careful study by Dr. Fernós while on his recent trip north, and in his address he explained how it has been established in several States with splendid results. In conclusion he emphasized that the nature of sanitary work should be essentially medical and scientific, and made mention of the fact that to-day Hygiene and Sanitation constitute a specialty in the medical profession. In fact, several of the leading American Universities are at present extending the degree of Doctor of Public Health.

Dr. Ramón Lavandero, Chief of the Bureau of Social Medicine and Puericulture, spoke about the work that is being carried out by his department, and how its usefulness would be greatly increased if the advantages of the Shepard-Towner Bill were extended to Porto Rico. He also demonstrated clearly that a strong spirit of cooperation on the part of the municipal authorities is absolutely essential to the ultimate success of his bureau.

The closing address of the afternoon was made by Dr. Ortiz who spoke on the educational aspect of the rural sanitation campaign being carried on by the Department of Health throughout the Island. A delegation representing the Department of Education, headed by Mr. Francisco Vizcarrondo, Assistant Commissioner of Education, was present and demonstrated enthusiastic interest in the topic under discussion.

Dr. Ortiz laid stress on the part that the rural school may play in the development of this work: by instructing the children in the first principles of hygiene, such as the necessity of cleaning their teeth regularly, taking a daily bath, avoiding hookworm infection through sanitary measures, sleeping in airy rooms. etc. He showed how the cooperation of the teacher and the school authorities in the rural sanitation campaign is absolutely necessary.

The evening session was held in the Insular Anti-Tuberculosis Sanatorium and an address on Tuberculosis was delivered by Dr. J. Rodríguez Pastor, Chief of the Bureau of Tuberculosis. The speaker said in part, that "modern views on the contagiousness of tuberculosis tend to discredit many of the precautionary measures that have prevailed up to the present time for the protection of adults against tuberculous infection. Adults are as a rule relatively immune to the effects of exogenous infections with tubercle bacilli. A factory worker suffering from tuberculosis, according to many modern



Group of physicians who attended and took part in the Conference of District Medical Inspectors.

authorities, does not constitute as much of a menace to his fellow-workers as we have been lead to believe up to this time. A tuberculous patient may live with a number of adults in the same house, and will not constitute a menace to them, provided he observes ordinary precautions."

"Children under two years of age, however, are extremely susceptible to tuberculous infection and should be protected at all costs," added Dr. Rodríguez Pastor. "Tuberculous mothers should by all means be separated from their babies if these are to be saved. Old people with "chronic catarrhs" should not be allowed to come near small children. They may have tuberculosis and often have it, and will readily transmit the infection to the child." He cited cases of *tuberculosis meningitis* and *miliary tuberculosis* in children which were traced directly to a grandparent who had been in contact with them only for a short period of time. The speaker closed his address by saying that the slogan in the campaign against tuberculosis should be: "Protect the infant; build up the child."

One of the leading features of the second day of the conference was the visits made to the Tuberculosis and Puericulture Clinics for the purpose of observing the work that is being carried on by these clinics.

The session that was held in the Biological Laboratory of the Department proved most interesting. Dr. P. Morales Otero spoke in a most practical and concise manner on the interpretation of the findings of microscopic and bio-chemical examinations. He also gave detailed instructions as to how to take and how to send to the Laboratory, specimens that are to be examined.

Dr. García Lascot gave a brilliant address in which he stated briefly his experience in the diphtheria-prevention campaign carried on in the public schools of San Juan. He discussed the Schick test and the subsequent immunization with the Toxin anti-toxin mixture of those giving a positive reaction.

Dr. Martín O. de la Rosa, Chief of the Bureau of Transmissible Diseases, opened the evening session with an address on the differential diagnosis of smallpox. He explained clearly the difference between smallpox and other diseases which present similar symptoms such as chickenpox. He mentioned the fact that young physicians are often led to make an incorrect diagnosis since the occurrence of the disease is rare in Porto Rico; therefore they have no opportunity to familiarize themselves with it. Smallpox has practically disappeared from the Island.

The next speaker of the evening was Dr. E. Silva, whose topic was the problem of clandestine construction in Porto Rico. He told how at one time entire districts (*barríos*) were constructed with no regard to sanitary laws and that within the last two years this condition has been so well controlled that to-day not a single house is constructed without a plan which has previously been approved by the Department of Health.

Dr. Ortiz took up the subject of Leprosy in its various forms and of its treatment. He discussed its diagnosis and laid special emphasis on the necessity of being able to recognize the disease in its various manifestations since it is often diagnosed as something else. He explained that some of the so-called Neurological diseases are leprous in nature, but because of lack of sufficient familiarity with its clinical manifestations and its pathology, physicians often fail to recognize it.

He presented four patients who are suffering from leprosy and pointed out the specific lesions and the clinical-pathologic manifestations in each case.

The conference was closed with brief remarks of appreciation by Dr. Ortiz in which he thanked all those who had taken part as well as those who had attended, for their cooperation, and expressed the hope that such assemblies would be repeated frequently.

