

HEALTH ACTIVITIES IN PORTO RICO DURING THE FISCAL YEAR 1925-1926

On submitting the last Annual Report, the Commissioner of Health, Dr. Pedro N. Ortiz, presented the following considerations regarding health conditions throughout the Island:

The work of education and prophylaxis is being extended more and more into the schools of Porto Rico through demonstration clinics, physical examination of the children and conferences. Plans are under way for the organization of Teachers' Institutes at Río Piedras, Arecibo, Aguadilla, Mayagüez, Ponce, Guayama, Humacao, Cayey, Lares and Caguas, with the cooperation of the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture. These institutes will be inaugurated at the beginning of next November and will last one week. A physician from the Department of Health will be detailed to work in cooperation with the educational authorities in a plan of health education, both at the University and at the public schools throughout the Island, and the new health unit which is being organized at Río Piedras will supply the necessary material for practical classes and demonstrations along the lines of public health.

CONFERENCES OF MEDICAL INSPECTORS

A general conference of all the district medical inspectors and of all the physicians and officers of the Department of Health was held in San Juan on February 23 and 24 of the present fiscal year. Both public-health problems and medical problems were discussed in relation to the work which is being carried on. A delegation from the Department of Education, headed by the Assistant Commissioner, attended the meetings and particular attention was given to the teaching of sanitation in the rural schools.

HEALTH UNITS

On October 15, 1925, Dr. A. Fernós Isern, Assistant Commissioner, left for New York where he arrived on the 20th, immediately visiting the offices of the International Health Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. An itinerary was there arranged for a visit to the Southern States with a view to studying the County Health-Unit System of Organization for local agencies of a Department of Health.

Dr. Fernós was accompanied by Dr. H. H. Howard, Director for the West Indies of the International Health Board. The State of Alabama was first visited. Both the central organization at the city of Montgomery and the local organizations at the cities of Selma, Dallas County, and Andalusia, Covington County, were studied. Besides county organization proper, milk ordinances, mosquito control in the hydro-electric plant at Gantt, hookworm control and laboratory work were among the special subjects taken up.

The second State visited was North Carolina. The same plan was followed, with visits to the State Department at Raleigh and to the cities of Durham, Charlotte and Salisbury. The organization of the Bureau of Health Education of the State Department of Health and the State Laboratory of Hygiene were specially studied also.

Dr. Fernós also visited the State of Maryland studying both the State Health Organization and the Health Organization of the city of Baltimore.

On returning to Porto Rico, Dr. Fernós rendered a report to me on his observations on the County Health-Unit System of organization, recommending that a trial be made in Porto Rico with the cooperation of the Rockefeller Foundation and the municipalities. His report embodied suggestions which have been used by the Department of Health.

In accordance with the modern idea of a health unit and adapting and modifying the methods which are giving better results in the United States, the health centers which were organized two years ago are going to be converted into municipal health units under the control of one public-health officer. In this way the old sanitary service which was reorganized to meet the demands of a larger amount of work, the health centers and the work of rural sanitation in each locality shall be consolidated. The medical inspection of the schools shall be taken up also and included in this organization. The first unit is being organized at Río Piedras and the expenses of running it shall be met according to arrangements made already, one-fourth by the International Health Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, one-fourth by the municipality and one-half by the Department of Health. It is our plan to use this first unit as a training center and as a model for the ones that will be established in the near future. This is the latest and most modern conception of public health work.

NEW URBANIZATION

As stated in last year's report, new urbanization of all sorts and

construction of all kinds are at present under the absolute control of the Department of Health, although drastic action has been necessary even in the rural districts. Slums and clandestine sections are rapidly disappearing and new districts conforming to sanitary requirements are taking their place, even in the remotest spots of Porto Rico and cities and towns present as a rule a better sanitary appearance. Our campaign has brought about as a result the education of the people and a better respect for law. All the municipalities without exception are fully cooperating with the Department of Health in the way of improving the living conditions of the people. We have corrected in the short lapse of two years the serious problems that were created through tolerance and neglect.

RURAL SANITATION

No work has given more prestige to the Department of Health and no activity has gained more sympathy than the campaign which is being carried on in the rural zone of Porto Rico in the way of raising the physical standard of the people. Although preferent attention is given to the control of uncinariasis, nevertheless, this service deals with all the phases of rural life among the country people and we can state at this time that at least one-third of the rural population of Porto Rico is provided with sanitary service which until recently was a privilege of the urban zone. This work has been completed in the towns of Aguadilla, Aguada, Rincón, Añasco, Las Marías, Moca, San Sebastián, Lares, Arecibo, Barceloneta, Manatí, Quebradillas, Isabela, Utuado, Vega Baja, Bayamón, Adjuntas, Ciales, Morovis and Corozal. Twenty-nine thousand and twenty-five latrines were constructed during the year and 67,727 rural inhabitants were examined for uncinariasis with a percentage of morbidity of 84.6. The work on rural sanitation is fully explained in detail under the proper heading.

The Division of Malaria control which deals with both urban and rural sanitation has its central offices at Fajardo where control measures are under way. Important investigations were carried out also at *barrio* Sunoco of Santurce, at *barrio Sardinera* of Dorado and at Arecibo; and as a result of an acute outbreak of malaria in the town of Salinas and adjacent country, part of the unit was transferred over that region. In this way the unit is ready to move to any locality where quick control measures are necessary, and where advice is requested by the municipalities and private individuals and corporations.

INSPECTION OF MILK PRODUCTION

Through the recommendation of the Department of Health, Act No. 77, "Providing punishment for the adulteration of milk, and for other purposes", was approved on August 12, 1925. This new law corrects deficiencies in the old law which was inadequate to meet the demands of a better production of milk. The Island has been divided into two districts, north and south, each one in charge of a special dairy inspector under the control of the veterinarian of the Department of Health, and a very active campaign is being carried on, with the result that the old dairies have been repaired and adjusted to meet new requirements and a great many standard dairies have been constructed. We give more attention to the source of milk production, as a better milk is distributed when the conditions under which it is produced are improved. In the organization of the new health units, dairy and milk inspection is one of the main activities.

VITAL STATISTICS

This Bureau, one of the most important of any department of health, is gradually being organized to meet international rules established and its general scope of activities can be favorably compared to any other organization of a similar nature in any country. The causes of death are grouped in accordance with the international list of causes of deaths and for each municipality, and even so, efforts are being made to separate the data of the urban statistics from those of the rural, and during the present fiscal year births have been classified according to this method, which will give a better idea of existing conditions in any locality. This work is beginning to be developed and in the light of limited resources and personnel, nevertheless, it is being organized in harmony with known modern ideas. The report submitted this year is a departure from the old routinary service and contains a great deal of valuable and useful information.

HEALTH STUDIO

The work of propaganda and education by means of moving pictures is being extended as we improve our methods. At the present time all the films are manufactured by us at a very low expense. Some of our pictures have been exhibited in the United States with great success and we have come to the conclusion that local pictures serve a better purpose. This work will be continued. Exhibitions have been given in all the towns and cities of Porto Rico, and even in the country, by the Bureau of Rural Sanitation.

SPECIAL NEW LEGISLATION AFFECTING THE DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH

The Social Medicine Council created by the Commissioner of Health, which had been functioning ever since its organization November 5, 1924, ceased with the organization of the Child Welfare Board, created by Law No. 39, approved June 24, 1925, it being considered by this Department that the aims of both boards were almost identical. The new board has its offices in the Department of Health according to law, and the Commissioner of Health and the Commissioner of Education are *ex-officio* members.

The original Council was composed of the following members.

A representative from the Department of Justice: Mr. Luis Samalea Iglesias;

A representative from the Department of Agriculture and Labor: Mr. Ramón Lebrón;

A representative from the Department of Education: Mr. Francisco Vizcarrondo;

A representative from the American Red Cross: Miss Beatriz Lassalle;

A representative from the Asociación Feminista: Mrs. Angela Negrón;

The School Director of San Juan: Mr. José González Ginorio;

The Chief of the Bureau of Social Medicine and Puericulture: Dr. Ramón Lavandero;

The Chief of the Bureau of Tuberculosis: Dr. José Rodríguez Pastor, and

The Assistant Commissioner of Health, Dr. A. Fernós Isern.

As provided by law, the Commissioner of Health, upon nomination of the board, appointed as secretary a member of the Department of Health, Mrs. Angela Negrón Muñoz who is also the secretary of the Bureau of Social Medicine and Puericulture. The aims of the board are: The study of all problems affecting childhood revising all present legislation on the subject, as well as the inspection of all institutions at present established to shelter or benefit the children of Porto Rico in any form.

The Governor appointed the following persons as members:

Dr. A. Fernós Isern

Mr. A. González Mena

Mrs. Isabel Andreu de Aguilar

Mrs. Grace Lugo Viñas

Mr. Luis Samalea Iglesias.

Dr. A. Fernós Isern, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Health was elected chairman.

On July 30, 1925, bill No. 62 became a law, "To amend section No. 28 of Act No. 10, approved April 6, 1916, entitled 'An Act to amend an act entitled "An Act to establish a system of juvenile courts; to provide for the care of neglected and delinquent children and to provide for the disposition of all cases of juvenile delinquency, and for other purposes"', approved March 11, 1915', and for other purposes."

According to this Law the entrance into the Boys' and Girls' Charity Schools shall be subject to an equal distribution amongst the municipalities of Porto Rico with reference to their population. The law has proved very beneficial and at present the quota pertaining to each municipality has been practically filled out.

INSTITUTIONS

On the 1st of June, the lepers that had been isolated at Cabras Island, at the entrance of San Juan harbor, were transferred to the new Leper Hospital at Trujillo Alto. The inauguration of this new hospital, which has accommodation for sixty patients, took place on June 13th with a very large attendance. This hospital conforms to all the standard requirements and can be classed as a first-class institution that honors Porto Rico. It is situated on a tract of land of 42 acres and has complete water supply and sewerage systems and the farm will be used for agricultural purposes. There are fifteen cottages each containing four rooms, one for each patient, with a little parlor, a veranda and closets, shower baths, toilets and electric light. There is one dining room for women and one for men, a clinic and laundry for the inmates and a large administration building with offices and living quarters and dependencies for the nurses and employees. The surrounding landscape is most attractive and no doubt the patients are enjoying a happy life even in the midst of the misfortune and physical disability caused by the disease.

CONSTRUCTION COMPLETED

The Institute for Blind Children constructed in San Juan was inaugurated at the beginning of January. Thirty children were moved from their old school at Ponce. The building is the first of a project which will be extended as more resources are available.

The preventorium for one hundred and fifty-one children is ready for occupancy. This institution is located on the farm between the Insular Sanatorium and the Insular Hospital for the Insane. It is expected that at the next session of the Legislature action will be taken in the way of providing funds for its maintenance.