

## ABSTRACTS FROM THE INFORMATION SERVICE OF THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

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### “ESSENTIAL FACTORS IN HEALTH PROGRESS”

“The triumphs of preventive medicine are widely acclaimed. Health departments report the decline of communicable diseases and the fall of the general death-rate. In recent years the infant mortality has dropped rapidly: in London, for example, it fell from 159 deaths (within the first year) per thousand living births in 1900 to 68 in 1925, and in New York from 192 to 65 during the same period.

“Smallpox is almost unknown in parts of Europe and in a few states of the United States; typhoid epidemics are rare in efficiently administered communities; tuberculosis is decreasing among many populations; diphtheria is coming under successful control; the outlook for preventing the spread of scarlet fever is brighter; malaria is being ousted from various strongholds; yellow fever seems to be making a last stand; cholera cannot seriously invade a country which has a modern water supply and proper disposal of wastes; typhus has few terrors for communities addicted to soap and water and clean linen.

“But the modern health movement is not content with sanitation and the control of communicable diseases; it goes on to the hygiene of groups and of individuals. It is not satisfied with a negative prevention of disease; it preaches a gospel of positive, active, vigorous physical and mental well-being.

“So the hygienes multiply to include mothers, babies, little children, school children, adults, industrial groups, and the victims of tuberculosis and of venereal diseases. A mental hygiene deals with feeble-mindedness, delinquency, criminal tendencies, maladjustments, and various forms of psychic disturbances. Food, clothing, posture, sleep, occupation, exercise, recreation, social relations, personal adjustments are becoming concerns of public health.

“Even this rapid glance at modern health organization and activity reveals a multiplicity of things being done by many different kinds of functionaries scattered over wide areas, organized about centers of authority, exercising power, and supported by large funds. Doctors, investigators, health officers, sanitary engineers, statisticians,

laboratory workers, technicians, nurses, inspectors, accountants, clerks, combined in working units which include city, town, and country, make up the personnel. Government departments, laws, and public funds provide appointments, authority, salaries, and supplies. In many cases voluntary health agencies maintained by private gifts supplement the resources of governments, help to show the feasibility of new measures, and educate public opinion in support of official policies.

The creation and maintenance in any country of a going concern like this calls for definite things. First of all, research must be encouraged and intercourse with world centers of investigations must be kept up, in order to have the essential scientific basis for effective work. In the second place the medical profession must be intelligent and sympathetic. *The physicians of a country can make or break a public-health program. It is they who diagnose maladies, report cases of communicable disease, educate their patients, make health examinations, give advice about personal hygiene, influence public opinion.*

*It makes a world of difference whether practitioners are wholly devoted to individual ills and curative medicine or are committed to the modern idea of prevention. The progress of public health is largely due to the leadership of doctors of imagination and public spirit. To its medical schools a country must look for the kind of training and idealism which will produce doctors of the new type. Medical education is a vital factor in the development of public health.*

*Again, the different kinds of officials and special workers must have technical professional training. Public health is not something to which anyone may turn without appropriate preparation. Furthermore, central services of many kinds must be set up: statistical bureaus, laboratories for diagnosis and for the production of vaccines, sera, and antitoxins, departments of communicable diseases, infant welfare, public-health nursing, venereal diseases, popular education and others.*

Still further, a system of organization—rural, municipal, state, or provincial, as well as national—must be created and official relations of authority and cooperation clearly laid down. Sanitary laws and codes must give authority. Appropriate salaries, protection against political influence, retiring allowances, social recognition must attract and hold men and women of the highest type of professional efficiency and personal character.

Finally, the public must be brought, through the education of

children, the wide diffusion of information, and the concrete services of clinics, health centres, and visiting nurses, to appreciate and support the idea of preventing disease and of promoting health.

*To sum up: the effectiveness of a national system of public-health service depends upon the appropriate and cooperative development of scientific research; medical education; the training of health officers, laboratory workers, engineers and nurses; the creation of central services; the organization of administrative units; the enactment of appropriate legislation; the provision of adequate funds, and the development of sound public opinion.*

