

REPORT OF MUNICIPAL HEALTH UNITS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1927

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

PART I

The Problem.

The organization of municipal health units was initiated to fill the need for additional local health activities with more comprehensive plans and unified control. The form of local organization in which there were in each town sanitary inspectors reporting to a central bureau in San Juan, functioned satisfactorily so long as the chief objects of the Department of Health were sanitary police and the suppression of epidemics. It was the rapid advance in the objectives and ideals of the Department of Health which demanded new instruments for carrying out the more complicated procedures of modern health work.

The Solution.

A study of local organizations in the continental United States led the Commissioner of Health, Doctor Pedro N. Ortiz, to introduce the type known there as the county health unit. The Rockefeller Foundation was invited to participate in the development of the new organization. By agreement with the respective municipalities health units were established in Río Piedras on October 1, 1926, and in Yabucoa on March 1, 1927. In each case it was agreed that during the first year of operation the Insular Department of Health would bear one-half of the expense of the new unit, the municipality one-fourth, and the Rockefeller Foundation, one-fourth. The agreement provided that the share of the Rockefeller Foundation would decrease year by year and that there would be a corresponding increase in the share of the expenses borne by each municipality.

It was proposed that during the first year the chief objectives of each unit should be the determination of the most urgent problems and the development of an organization to handle them. The operation of the sanitary police was to be left undisturbed until the new activities were established. During the period of organization the personnel of each unit was as follows: A full-time medical health

officer, a laboratory technician and clerk, two or three public-health nurses, and a caretaker.

Results Obtained.

The present report gives the accomplishments of the health unit in Río Piedras during nine months of its period of organization and those of the Yabucoa unit during a period of three months. The most important items reported were as follows:

Effective co-operation of the medical profession in communicable diseases.

Institution of elementary measures for the control of communicable diseases with epidemiological investigation and active measures against the sources of infection discovered.

Physical examination of school children of the first, second, and third grades with correction of important defects.

Active immunization against smallpox and diphtheria on a program which should cover all of the schools of each municipality before the end of the next fiscal year.

Numerically some of the important accomplishments were as follows:

	Río Piedras	Yabucoa
School children examined.....	1,358	328
Persons treated for uncinariasis.....	1,598	662
Persons treated for communicable skin diseases..	201	74
Completed toxin-antitoxin administration.....	2,649	990
Smallpox vaccinations.....	6,443	724
Cases of communicable diseases isolated.....	331	90
Diphtheria carriers located and treated.....	61	2
Fecal examinations for intestinal parasites....	3,334	1,492
Diphtheria cultures	1,509	275
Blood specimens for Wasserman.....	441	128

ACTIVITIES OF INDIVIDUAL MUNICIPAL HEALTH UNITS

RIO PIEDRAS

Description of the Municipality.

Like nearly all the municipalities of Porto Rico, Río Piedras consists of a rural portion and an urban portion. With the growth of the adjacent capital city and the overflow of its population into surrounding territory the urban zone of Río Piedras is rapidly gaining in wealth and importance. The official estimate of population based on the census of 1920 and growth in the previous ten-year period is 20,437 in the rural zone and 7,657 in the urban zone, a total of 28,094. The total area of the municipality is about 37.9 square miles. Even in the rural zones the density of population is more than 500 per square mile.

The terrain of the municipality is characteristic of that of the northeastern coast of the Island. The northern portion, which is also the urban zone, is rather flat and contains much swampy land and some small lakes. In this portion there are probably extensive areas in which anophelene mosquitoes breed. The southern portion of the municipality is more broken, but there are no important elevations. The road from San Juan to Ponce traverses the municipality from north to south, the road to Fajardo and the east coast runs east from the town of Rio Piedras and the road to Guaynabo runs in a westerly direction. In the northern part of the municipality there are numerous roads and streets so that every locality is readily accessible. In the south there are a few municipal roads but they are not all available for motor traffic. The southeastern portion of the municipality is accessible only on foot or by horse.

The southern portion of the municipality is an agricultural region. The chief crop is sugar-cane and there is a sugar-mill or *central* near the town which receives cane from this and adjacent municipalities. Tobacco is also raised and this region leads in the production of vegetables for the San Juan and Rio Piedras markets. Dairying is another important industry as is shown by the registration of more than sixty dairies with the local health office.

Two important institutions which are located in Rio Piedras are the University of Porto Rico and the Insular Agricultural Experiment Station. The University and Normal School together have an enrollment of about 1,600 in the school year and 1,000 in the summer session. The presence of these institutions is of great assistance to progressive movements for the betterment of the town, for the staff of each institution takes an active part in civic affairs.

The municipality has the usual organization for taking care of sickness among such indigent poor as are able to apply for it at designated stations. This consists of a hospital with an out-patient department and a dispensary for the treatment of emergency cases. Other health activities which were operating in the municipality prior to the organization of the health unit were as follows:

A chief sanitary inspector with a clerk, three inspectors and a messenger, in charge of the inspection of new buildings and general sanitary police. This force was responsible to the Bureau of General Inspection of the Department of Health. Four sanitary inspectors in charge of the installation of latrines in rural districts. They were under the direction of the Bureau of Rural Sanitation of the Department of Health.



Awaiting the attention of the Rio Piedras Health Unit



Every school child must have a vaccination certificate

One part-time dentist, responsible to the municipal assembly. In the school year 1925-26 he received \$1,000 for giving attention to school children two hours a day. In the school year 1926-27 this time was reduced to one hour a day and the salary was reduced to \$600.

One part-time physician in charge of the students of the University of Porto Rico. He also gave some attention to the Practice School of the University which is attended by children from the town. He was responsible to the University authorities.

A rather inactive branch of the Society for the Prevention of Tuberculosis in Children.

Organization of the Municipal Health Unit.

The municipal health unit was organized to unify the control of those activities related to the prevention of diseases and the conservation of health. There is no intention that the unit will take any part in the functions of the regularly constituted agencies for the treatment of the indigent sick. It was recognized upon the organization of the unit that there were many new health projects which were urgently needed for the health of the growing children of the municipality and that the organization of only a limited number of these projects would consume the entire attention of the director during the first year. It was decided, therefore, that during the period of the organization of these new activities the unit should function simply as another of the health agencies of Río Piedras and that unification should not be undertaken until the director should be ready to undertake the broader administrative duties.

Arrangements were made for the correlation of the work of the unit with that of the other health agencies mentioned and with those in charge of the different schools of the municipality. Especially close relations were established and maintained with the supervisors and teachers of all public schools, with the faculty of the University and with the staff of the University and with the staff of the University Practice Schools.

The personnel directly attached to the Municipal Health Unit of Río Piedras during the fiscal year 1926-27 was as follows:

Dr. E. Garrido Morales, Epidemiologist of the Department of Health, who was detached from his regular duties for the purpose of organizing the unit. He returned to his regular post during the month of February, 1927.

Dr. E. Martínez Rivera, Health Officer.

One microscopist-clerk.

Two public-health nurses from November to January and three from February to June.

One social-service worker, supplied by the Insular Department of Health during the months of May and June.

Two sanitary inspectors, supplied by the Insular Department of Health during the months of May and June.

Physicians for tuberculosis clinic, supplied by the Insular Tuberculosis Sanatorium.

One caretaker.

The chief activities planned for the period of organization were classified under three main heads: public-health education, control of communicable diseases, including hookworm disease, and tuberculosis and child hygiene, including medical inspection of schools.

Public-Health Education.

The chief formal work in public-health education was in addresses to meetings held by the unit or by parent-teachers' associations. In addition numerous newspaper articles were written by the organizer and the director and printed matter in the form of leaflets and pamphlets were distributed. The latter form of educational work was limited because of the lack of suitable material bearing on the work being done by the unit. The entire personnel of the unit took an active part in the Institute for Rural Teachers which was held in Río Piedras in November and also in the campaign of the League for the Prevention of Tuberculosis in Children to raise money for the construction of a small preventorium. In the subject-matter of the educational work for the year the subjects stressed most were uncinariasis and its prevention and the prevention of diphtheria.