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HEALTH EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS*

By A. FERNÓS ISEÑ, M. D., Assistant Commissioner of Health

MR. CHAIRMAN:

I rather doubt my ability to deliver a conference on this subject, for I do not pretend to master pedagogies to such a degree as to be able to determine what methods should be followed in the teaching of health in high schools. Of course I do believe that health teaching is a very proper subject to include in your curriculum, and I shall presently comment on its special importance amongst us; but the *modus operandi* should be and must be the result of the joint efforts of both teachers and public health experts, not the dictum of any of the two isolated groups.

In fact, this has already been done. As you know, three years ago, in 1924, a report was rendered by the Joint Committee on Health Problems in Education of the National Education Association and the American Medical Association.

In my remarks I shall follow them in their suggestions and recommendations, which are very wise. The first one is not to follow them too closely, lest local facts and factors, essential to success, be overlooked.

Health Education in secondary schools is, and should be, to my mind, not a new subject suddenly brought to the pupils' attention, but the continuation of that health education commenced at kindergarten years, continued through elementary school years, and then coming up for expansion and revision in the more mature years of secondary teaching.

In those first years of school life it is not didactic teaching, but practical habit-forming exercises that account for more. Children are not then told and should not be told, the why of things so much as the how of things.

In these latter high-school years, on the other hand, the reasons, the rationale of habits and procedures should be taught; it is nec-

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essary to equip the young citizen with such armamentarium of knowledge as will enable him later in life to cope with such new and unexpected situations as he may be called upon to face.

I have a copy of your curriculum and notice what required and what elective subjects you have. Among the latter, are Health and Hygiene.

It is not my part to decide; it is up to you whether this subject should be elective or required. Be this as it may, you have enough subjects in your curriculum (outside this special one on Health and Hygiene) to open your way to the teaching of things fundamental in Health Education.

In the first place, there is geography. It occasions the teaching of such facts as: places of the world where staples are raised; the dependency of certain people on importations for food products; the surplus production in others, etc. There is a chance also to study climate, and its bearing on the habits of life of a people; its effects upon health conditions, etc.

General Science teaches the existence of microorganisms and their relation to human life.

History may explain the evolution of human habits of life, and of industrial conditions affecting life.

And so in Social Civics. With it the study of the duties of a citizen with regard to health questions arises; the organization of social health-protecting organisms; the existence of the sanitary code; and of laws for the regulation of working conditions.

We cannot pass by Home Economics without comment. Nutrition is the basis of health; proper feeding is the basis of nutrition. Mankind has enough knowledge of food and nutrition at this time not to abandon itself to the calls of instinct; it should follow the guidance of intelligence.

There is also physical training, with all its bearings on muscle development, good posture, endurance, self-reliance and civic habits of fair play. And after that, Biology, Zoology and Botany leading to the study of mosquitoes (vectors of malaria, filaria and dengue), of worms (the cause of hookworm disease); and at last Chemistry with its teaching of calories, food analysis, combustion, etc.

There are then many avenues of approach to the subject of Health Education. But there should be some time for synthesis and coordination; and that chance is the special subject of Health and Hygiene. All the previous knowledge is interrelated, organized, articulated into a résumé of health habits, notions, reasons, general

comprehension, which makes the student better able to advance in life, as a more useful citizen.

There is the chance too, to take up the special problems surrounding us. There is the chance to take up tropical conditions of living; such tropical conditions which make life so easy for all—human, animal and plant—that at last make it very hard to live . . . paradoxical as it may sound; for life defeats itself through its own exuberance.

The facility of human life makes for the creation of social conditions inimical to human life. So are slums (tropical slums) created over night, in spite of strict policing; so are mosquito-breeding places developed any moment; and so are the lack of winter, the shade from the luxuriant tropical vegetation, the suave and healing temperature of our eternal spring; all reasons and causes for development of the hookworm in the open field.

The knowledge and comprehension of these facts; that of the modes and manners of prevention are, no doubt, very proper subjects for a high-school curriculum.

Local conditions should be understood and realized. In the States the main causes of death are heart disease, kidney disease, and respiratory diseases.

With us it is gastro-enteritis in infants and children, malnutrition, tuberculosis and malaria. Other disease do not kill, but are a tremendous handicap, as in the case of hookworm.

High-school years are pre-marriage years. They afford the chance to educate students for motherhood and for fatherhood. There is the chance, through education, to lower the figures of innocent victims, to their parents sins.

Then there is the chance to help the people to develop a technic of life, compatible with the existence of automobiles, movies, sea-bathing, and jazz; and to still avoid accidents and live.

There is where school work can advance a great distance. Individual interest in health questions; personal hygiene; are essential to a sound state of public and individual health. This is in a large proportion the task of the School.

