

SANITATION AND HEALTH ACTIVITIES ARE FOSTERED IN PORTO RICO UNDER DIRECTION OF COMMISSIONER *

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According to the Organic Act of Porto Rico approved by Congress on March 2, 1917, "the Commissioner of Health shall have general charge of all matters relating to public health, sanitation and charities, except such as relate to the conduct of maritime quarantine, and shall perform such other duties as may be prescribed by law."

The Legislative Assembly of Porto Rico created a board of health composed of seven members, appointed by the Governor of Porto Rico by and with the advice and consent of the Insular Senate, namely: Four physicians, one chemist, one sanitary engineer, one lawyer.

This board of health has only legislative functions. The Commissioner of Health, who is appointed by the Governor by and with the advice and consent of the Insular Senate also, is the executive officer and is the head of the Department of Health, but he is not a member of the Insular Board of Health.

Public health work in Porto Rico is centralized. All the local health organizations function under the absolute control and direction of the central office which is located in San Juan, the capital of the island. For the purpose of medical inspection the country is divided into seven senatorial districts, each under the supervision of a chief medical inspector. Inspectors of health under civil service regulations are in charge of these local health organizations and the number is determined by the size and importance of the town. As a rule the small towns have only one inspector of health.

A change now is being introduced in the local health organizations with the cooperation of the International Health Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, according to the county health-unit system of some States of the Union. The municipalities are interested in this new type of organization as local stimulus is aroused in public health work, since they are required to share the expenses. One of the standard or model units established already has a full-time medical officer, two visiting nurses, four sanitary inspectors, one laboratory assistant, clerical help and a caretaker. A car is always at the disposal of the unit for service both in the urban and rural sections.

* From The United States Daily; June 21, 1929.

This type of unit holds tuberculosis clinics weekly, child welfare and prenatal clinics, engages in the medical inspection of all the schools of the community, takes care of transmissible diseases, promotes the participation of private organizations in public health work and through the inspectors of health enforces sanitary regulations in accordance with the police power granted by law. The Department of Health is developing another type of unit which, although the scope of activities is similar to that of the standard or model units, nevertheless receives a share contributed by the municipal governments dependent upon local economic possibilities. This policy has been adopted since the recent hurricane which swept the island on September 13, 1928, as new economic problems had to be confronted by the local governments.

The general organization of the Department of Health of Porto Rico is as follows: Commissioner of Health, Assistant Commissioner of Health, Bureau of Transmissible Diseases, Bureau of Sanitary Engineering, Bureau of Property and Accounts, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Biological Laboratory, Chemical Laboratory, Insular Pharmacy.

In the year 1923 the following bureaus, services and divisions were created; Bureau of Rural Sanitation, Bureau of Malaria Control, Bureau of Plague Prevention, Bureau of Social Welfare, Bureau of Tuberculosis, Bureau of Social Hygiene, Bureau of Public Health Education, Bureau of General Inspection, Division of Roentgenology. Porto Rico Review of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Epidemiologist.

The Bureau of Social Welfare covers a wide field of activities among which may be mentioned the services of visiting nurses, prenatal and babies' and children's clinics.

The Bureau of Transmissible Diseases includes services and subdivisions which more or less are related to the isolation of patients and the prevention of disease, namely: Leper Hospital, Quarantine Hospital, Vaccination Service, Board of Embalmers and Vaccinators, Board of Parole, for the study and conditional release of lepers.

A veterinary service, a division of food and drugs inspections and the general inspection of all the sanitary services, particularly the local service, all fall under the Bureau of General Inspection.

Besides the general public health and sanitary work the Commissioner of Health of Porto Rico has charge of the following institutions: Insane Hospital for 1,000 patients, Boys' Charity School, Blind Asylum, Leper Hospital, School for the Blind, Deaf and Dumb Asylum, Quarantine Hospital, Insular Sanatorium for tubercular

patients at San Juan, Insular Sanatorium for tubercular patients at Ponce, two District Hospitals.

The Department of Health of Porto Rico follows the most modern methods of public health work. It has risen from a simple service of sanitation which dealt exclusively with environmental problems, like everywhere mostly of an engineering nature, to the present status. The establishment of the municipal health unit is the most recent achievement.

The organization of the Department of Health of Porto Rico in order to cope with actual needs, dates from the year 1917 when it was created by statute, but during the year 1923 a reorganization was effected and the services just mentioned account for this progressive change of policy in order to face new problems which had been overlooked in the past.