PRACTICAL VALUE OF FULL TIME HEALTH OFFICERS

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It seems superfluous to attempt to advance any arguments in favor of a proposition that is obvious to any one that will give it a moment's attention. Unfortunately, however, people are so constituted that they will not give serious consideration to the apparent, simple things of life whose results stand for everything that we would like in the way of better health, increased longevity, greater physical efficiency, and more happiness. Probably the reason for the great indifference of the people at large is due to the fact that the ordinary individual depends upon the State or the Municipality to provide whatever protection is necessary. While this is now true, in the main due to our more thorough knowledge of the cause of deteriorating conditions, it has become a question of individual as well as State responsibility. The individual, however, does not like to sacrifice his convenience for the public good; therefore the Public to defend itself must resort to preventive measures, making observance of well known rules and regulations compulsory, and for the better carrying out of these principles men trained specifically to this work emphasize the practical value of a full-time health officer.

That this condition has been appreciated is proven by the fact that many colleges now give special courses and training in public health work, many societies have been organized whose deliberations are only on this line. Many journals now devote all of their pages to preventive medicine and to public health endeavors. Yet with all of this we are woefully lacking in sufficient good material to present the message properly. Public health service for years and years has been dealt with in a haphazard sort of fashion, and because of the fact that we are not daily threatened by an epidemic that takes a large toll of lives, we become indifferent, and the custom has grown to employ some man with a slight knowledge to carry on this work. This means the part-time man.

I know whereof I speak, as at one time I enjoyed this position at the munificent salary of $300 per annum, and now I know that I was overpaid. I am safe in saying right now that the same is the case anywhere where a part-time man is employed; in other words, there is no value under these conditions. Owing to the fact of remarkable discoveries being made of the causes of disease, especially of communicable diseases, and also owing to the fact that the laity reads and digests this knowledge, a demand has been created for Directors who will devote their entire time and energies in this field; hence the full-time man, and just now physicians are beginning to appreciate this work because more men are entering this field than ever before.

Physicians have been very slow to do health work; first, because the compensation has been very small; second, the prospect of advancement beyond a certain point has also been small; but we are beginning to realize that a good salary regularly received is worth more than the general compensation of an uncertain practice. Another factor may enter into this problem and that is the absence of mathematical demonstration of the results, nor have we patience enough to allow a period of years to elapse to prove the benefits received. As an example, and this has occurred often, a case of infectious disease arrives in a town, is laxly controlled and fifty other cases result. In a neighboring city the same original case arrives, is thoroughly controlled and no other case results. Is there a benefit credited or claimed? Now this is going on all the time.

Dr. McCullough of Ontario in an address recently read before the American Public Health Association says, "Considering the situation at the present time, the conclusion has been reached that our greatest need is a competent full-time directing head of a health department with an efficient organization, whether it be in the state, the county or the municipality. Public health is a large business, and some of us at least may be of the opinion that the advancement of public health is one of the most important if not the most important business of the state". According to the figures collected by Dr. Fer-

rell in 1914, there were but three full-time health officers in the United States. At the present time there are close to 250, and the figure is being added to rather rapidly. In Illinois the County Health Officer Bill failed of passage in the last Legislature. In spite of that we now have two, Morgan and Jacksonville combined and Cook County. There are only three full-time municipal health officers, exclusive of Chicago, in the state. These figures taken collectively prove that the sentiment in favor of full-time men is being rapidly appreciated.

The trend of medicine today is toward prevention, and it depends upon the trained hygienist and sanitarian to spread the knowledge that is necessary in this preventive work. What was formerly considered the ravages of time we now know are the ravages of bacteria and an unphysiological manner of living. With the adoption of safety measures, thus avoiding accidental conditions including those producing malignancy, it would be interesting to note just what the limit of life would be. To this particular phase of work the full-time man should devote considerable attention. Seven years ago I devoted considerable time to training trees with results that were remarkably gratifying, and we all know what Burbank has done both by careful selection and cultivation. As the secret of our education is to begin with the young, it is evident that the Hygienist and the Sanitarian should be ones who can impress upon impressionable minds the lessons of prevention and proper methods of living. A full-time man proves his value in proportion to his knowledge and application of it to the oncoming generation. The part-time man has neither the ability nor the inclination and certainly not the time if he is in active practice. Therefore he is not to be considered in this connection at all.

There are two problems, and very serious ones, in the appointment of full-time health officers; one is the tenure of office and the other is his political associations. It is apparent that any full-time man who must rely on political influence to continue in office is not the man who should be employed. It is unfortunate that at the present time most of the appointments are political, and as Ruhland of Milwaukee has observed, "Under these circumstances it is not difficult to see that those who are

asked to take the responsibility of public health service will treat that appointment somewhat as a side issue and not as *the* issue."

The great objection to the employment of full-time men has been the supposed inability to pay a requisite salary. This objection is overcome in the State of Illinois and in several other States by the adoption of the law wherein two or more towns can join together and form a public health district and levy a small tax for the maintenance of the health department. If this is properly presented there should be very little difficulty in securing public health departments in any number of communities, for the benefits conferred are far greater than can be had by any other investment. To nullify as much as possible political influence, the law of Illinois provides that appointments should be made from a list of eligibles from the State Department of Public Health, and this list is made up by a competitive examination.

The law that I refer to was caused to be placed upon our statute books by the late Mr. F. W. Matthiessen of LaSalle, a man of remarkable vision and fortunately associated with it the ability to determine its expediency. He endowed the Hygienic Institute for LaSalle, Peru and Oglesby with sufficient funds, the income of which pays the necessary expenses. The Hygienic Institute is a corporate body operating solely for the benefit in public health service for the three cities mentioned. The Institute employs a Director who is Health Commissioner of each city and a member of the board of health of each respective city. The Hygienic Institute is controlled by a Board of five Trustees and is perpetual in character. Besides the Director it employs necessary assistant Health Commissioners, Bacteriologist and Chemist, three school Nurses and an Infant Welfare Nurse, a Veterinary for inspection of dairies, Stenographer and assistant Technician, and owns and operates one of the finest Isolation Hospitals for contagious diseases. All of these at its own expense, and the price is not prohibitive to any community of our size. Our records prove that our morbidity and our mortality and our longevity are of a better percentage than communities who do not operate with a full-time health officer.