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## PUBLIC HEALTH IN WARTIME

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A nation at war has to call on all its resources, and one of the sources of strength of a nation is the health of its people. This was my observation last year when I was in England during the trying period of intensive aerial bombing. Under conditions of war, England is paying particular attention to her public health, and there is much in her experience that we can profitably consider in this country, at this time.

The progress we have made in recent years in promoting the health of our public is one of the great achievements of our country. Public health is concerned not only with programs that prevent infectious diseases, such as diphtheria, whooping cough, tuberculosis, and typhoid fever, but public health is also concerned with efforts to improve our diet, our vision, and our mental as well as our general state of health. We have gone far in extending to our citizens the right that is theirs—the protection of life, the relief of suffering, and the prevention of disease.

Let us consider the organizations and persons that work together to promote public health in this country. There are of course the civil agencies, from local community to federal government, that function as authorized bodies to look after our many public health needs. Add to them the many technical persons and groups who gather information for the use of these agencies—scientific medicine, laboratory workers, investigators, engineers; these are the toilers who furnish the tools with which the public health administrator works. Then there are the unselfish volunteer lay organizations that do so much real good for all classes of people in all sorts of circumstances. The official as well as the unofficial agencies are being increasingly motivated by a social consciousness.

But the advances in public health have not been due entirely to these organiza-

tions with their technical backgrounds. They have been due in large part to the receptivity of the public, to its willingness and at times its demand for safeguards of its health, and to intelligent co-operation between the public and the health agencies. The strength of our public health plan lies in this combination of forces.

We, in these times, find ourselves at a high level of public health accomplishment. We have seen improvements we can actually measure, besides many benefits that are beyond the application of a yardstick. Infant and maternal mortality has been reduced. The acute diseases of childhood are not exacting the toll they once did. Physical examinations and corrections of defects in school children are commonplace. Eyes, teeth, and posture of young people are deservedly attracting attention and correction. Early immunization has almost eliminated diphtheria, and tuberculosis is at its lowest ebb. New drugs, better medical care, and early diagnosis have reduced the hazards of pneumonia, tuberculosis, blood poisoning, and child-bed fever. The industrial worker is being protected. Housing is improved year by year. We have kinds and quantities of food to an extent that we have never had before, and our children are taller and stronger than we were. More people are living to an advanced age, and our mortality rate is at the lowest in the history of our country.

This may look like a favorable situation—and so it is, but let us not congratulate ourselves too heartily! Victory is only partial and hangs on a narrow margin, for the forces of nature and the complexities of human life make our health situation constantly precarious. Our advances will be maintained only with ever-increasing vigilance, work and intelligent co-operation. We cannot afford to be complacent or self-satisfied, but must continue our upward progress, so that more may profit by our efforts, as we value human life and the right of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

We are now at war, and we are fighting for the essentials and principles of a democratic way of life. Insofar as public health is an expression of the democratic regard for the worth of the individual, we are fighting also for the principles of public health. I do not mean to say that the health of the public is not protected in the undemocratic nations. But there the life of the individual is preserved for his greater usefulness to the State. Here, we proceed on the basis that the person is what counts, so that it is our point of view regarding public health that we are striving to maintain. And this is another reason why just now we cannot afford to relax our vigilance over our national public health.

Then there is a third basis for our increased attention to our health—protection against the added strains and exposures of modern warfare. I am speaking primarily to civilians and to them I should say that a total war means total civilian participation in one way or another. We civilians need our good health so that we can do our daily jobs regularly and better. We want to preserve the health of ourselves and of our families so that cause for worry and distraction from our work will not come from illness in us or in our families. The industrial worker is to be protected as never before, in order that he may play his role in being “the man behind the man behind the gun.” And because there are now sixteen men, and women, supplying each man at the front, the importance of the health and working power of the civilian is greatly magnified in this time of modern war.

We must protect the home front—if not against bombs and shells, then certainly against the unseen parasites, the harmful bacteria, that may do more damage than bombs. If we do this job well, then we are doing our part as civilians in the total war effort.

Having pointed out the progress we have made in public health and the reasons why we must extend and intensify our programs, let me refer to some of the specific factors that may threaten us as a civilian public, and to measures and agencies that we can call on to protect our public health.

We are fortunate in having a high standard of education and sense of personal responsibility. We as a people know a good deal about health matters, and this is a time where we can use what we know and be ready to learn more. For instance, we could gain so much by learning the basic principles of first-aid and by knowing what foods are essential for our well-being. And it would be well if we are on the alert for signs of ill health and then promptly put the case into the hands of medical or other authorities.

In our modern way of living in large or small communities and with our modern rapid means of transportation, epidemic diseases may quickly become a serious menace to large numbers of people. All the governmental agencies organized to recognize and meet such emergencies will be especially on the alert at these times, ready to attack a threat to our public health. We as individuals have an added responsibility to co-operate with authorized bodies of men and women who are working for our common good.

Immunization programs against diphtheria and smallpox are being emphasized. Although these programs are thoroughly justified in peacetime, they are of added importance for the preservation of life and health and for the removal of anxiety and confusion in wartime. And so with other programs in public health, as child and maternal welfare, dental care, clinics and medical care, the maintenance of our usual programs is to be insisted on, both by the public and by those already authorized to conduct them.

There may come a time when our food situation will not be as we are accustomed to, if that time is not already here. Not that we will suffer from lack of food, for we probably will not, but there may be certain kinds of food that will be limited in amount, and distribution may not be as effective as usual. We realize the importance of food in connection with our well-being and, as in the case of other health matters, we are an educated public willing to adapt ourselves to new circumstances; and if we find ourselves without a certain food we will be ready to restrict our diet or to use a substitute for the lacking item. Food science has progressed greatly in recent years, and we may rest assured that a scientific management of our food situation will go into effect if there comes a time when it appears necessary. Until then, we as civilians will follow the advice and choice we have, so as to maintain ourselves at the highest point of well-being to meet the added burdens of total war.

Our living in communities has caused the organization of certain services that we now consider essential. I am referring to our electric and gas utilities, water supplies, our milk and food distribution, and sewage disposal plants. The proper functioning of these services is an accepted principle. Since, however, confusion, want and perhaps epidemic disease would result if the services failed to function properly, we see them in their true light of importance. Their effective maintenance in times of war is an added responsibility for those persons and agencies charged with supplying them.

Under these critical circumstances that we face, it is not enough that we use only the information that we now have available. Our scientific knowledge is far from complete. We must continue to search and research, so that we will learn more of the secrets of Nature, and have this information ready to solve old problems and to meet new ones. Therefore, our research laboratories, our educational institutions, our investigators in the field, and men working in quiet places will work on and supply the information necessary for the emergency and for the permanent good of mankind.

The promotion of the public health is a real weapon in the struggle for our democratic principles. In the protection of the life and health of the individual, we are making it possible for him to enjoy the freedom of self-development. At this time he is fitting himself to serve himself and country to save the right to be free. Protection of his health gives him strength to meet new physical and mental demands, and prevention of illness in his family removes a source of worry and distraction.

It is clear from this brief discussion that public health in wartime has new significances. We cannot take for granted those advances we have been enjoying. We must maintain, intensify and extend our public health programs so that we may meet the new emergency with added strength and resources.

Up to now I have not mentioned a certain word that is in such wide use these days. It expresses an important factor in the will-to-do in our war effort. I refer to the powerful word, "morale."

Have I not been speaking of morale all the time? Do not the factors of health, food, safety, and confidence in responsible agencies all contribute to the sense of will? If we think of the disastrous physical and mental effects of illness, hunger, epidemics and disorganization, surely we can see that our outlook and morale depend on the precious possessions we now enjoy.

And for what purpose do we desire public health and morale? Certainly, so that we can effectively do our tasks in wartime; but let us look forward also, and hope that we will gain permanent advantages and that the democratic principle of the personal worth of the individual is won!

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