

World at War Is Facing a Shortage of Doctors

So Many Men Are Drafted for the Trenches That People at Home Must Systematize Prevention of Disease, Says Dr. Geier

IT is nothing to have from 20,000 to 30,000 wounded soldiers in twenty-four hours. You have them lying there. Are you going to leave them where they lie?"

Colonel T. H. Goodwin, Royal Army Medical Corps, was talking to a group of American physicians in this city last week. The answer already given by the English doctors to his question was grimly indicated by Colonel Goodwin. "Where will we get more doctors?" he said. "We haven't got them. That's what it comes to."

But the appalling havoc that the war has wrought among the doctors is not only felt by the army; the civilian population at home in England is also suffering from a lack of medical attention. The outbreak of an epidemic—anything like the infantile paralysis plague that swept over a portion of the United States last year—would find England in a critical predicament. Doubtless the other warring nations are in the same uneasy situation.

"The entry of the United States into the great struggle is going to put us in the same position as are England and presumably the other combatants," warns Dr. Otto P. Geier of Cincinnati, Chairman of the Preventive Medicine Section of the American Medical Association. In enlarging upon the situation he continued: "Already an impressive number of our doctors have gone to the front, many of them leaders of the profession. It is only an indication of the response that will be made by the medical profession when our soldiers are actually sent into the trenches. It is inevitable that the medical resources of our country will be drained just as have been the medical resources of England."

"In sizing up the problem before us, it must be remembered that this depletion of our medical forces comes at a time when, because of the fearful destruction of national man-power in combat, it will be particularly necessary to work for the conservation of health at home."

"There is no problem of greater urgency than this conservation of our national health. National health means national efficiency. We must begin now to store up energy for the great industrial struggle that is to come with the cessation of the war."

"With a greater need for health conservation and a seriously lessened medical force, it goes without saying that now, more than ever, it is necessary to adopt the most economic method of combating disease. This is to be found in thoroughly organizing and stirring into activity all those forces that tend toward the prevention of disease."

"In the present emergency the general public should be roused to the necessity of greater activity than ever before in 'swat the fly' campaigns, in neighborhood 'clean up and brush up' work, in ridding the community of all mosquito-breeding pools, in thoroughly enforcing the 'don't spit' mandate. Every person who sells, handles, or buys food should see that it is kept free from contamination. The purity of water supply and the sanitary disposal of sewage should all be carefully looked after."

"These activities, of course, should not be left solely to the individual; town, county, and State should all co-operate. That economy in public health activities may prove the most expensive kind of parsimony is always true, but the truth of it is more apt to be brought home now than ever before. These activities, however, will by no means meet our requirements for the conservation of public health. That will be done only by the consummation of those changes that have gradually been taking place in the medical profession. And it is to be hoped that the present emergency will work this consummation."

"In the strikingly evolutionary programs of the twentieth century no group of individuals has had its old-time relationships more radically changed than have the physicians. Many factors, so-

cial and economic, have been responsible. Some of these evolutionary changes have promptly and voluntarily come from within the profession, others have been forced upon the profession.

"It is evident that the doctors have for all time passed beyond the stage of the absolutely individual and personal relationship of family physician and patient to one where the community steps in to safeguard itself against any abuse of the old circumscribed relationship, and demands collective action in matters of health for the benefit of all."

"The concentration of population in cities has developed problems beyond the control of the private physician. With density of population have come the tenement, bad housing and living conditions, tuberculosis, alcoholism, venereal diseases, poverty, delinquency, and crime. The development of industry, with its occupational hazards, has created another series of health impairments, which the family physician may have the knowledge to alleviate, but the prevention of which is entirely beyond his control."

"Every social disorder has a medical aspect in the neglect of the laws of a healthy mental and physical state. If the medical profession is to fill its place in the new order of things, it must realize that its work is fundamental to the solution of social problems; it must realize the necessity for community thinking, community action."

"Now let us see what are the needs of the individual. If we can devise a program that will meet his needs, it can probably be extended advantageously to the community. A man needs health so that he can work effectively and so earn a good wage, a job in an industry free from health and accident hazards, a healthful home accessible to his work, intelligent medical care in time of illness, protection to his home and industry, good schools for his children which safeguard the health, a Health Department which will protect himself and family against contagious diseases, healthful recreation for himself and family."

"It will be seen at a glance that his success and happiness are all predicated on his health and that of his family; that this health is possible only through collective action; that the family physician appears only when some health agency has failed to prevent disease."

"Statistics have been collected which are said to show that the annual wage loss in the United States due to sickness is \$500,000,000. Tuberculosis, it is said, claims an annual economic loss in this country of nearly the same amount. Bad housing, bad living, alcoholism, venereal disease, and occupational diseases would surely add an equal number of millions. And the same may be said of the annual labor turnover, or the quick hiring and firing of help; also of voluntary absence from work due to personal reasons or lack of application."

"Now, these social and economic losses, totaling billions, are all preventable if society is really in earnest about improving its fundamental health conditions."

"If we would be successful in the improvement of the health and happiness of the nation, we must, to begin with, reorganize both private health practice and public health practice. Both must be placed on a higher plane of efficiency. We must set up adequate public health machinery by reorganizing the Federal, State, and municipal health work. This work must be entirely removed from political control so that scientific attainment and spirit may pervade the whole organization; and then we may have the maximum of co-ordination and co-operation throughout this machinery for the attainment of 100 per cent. efficiency in working for public health."

"What share of the \$500,000,000 loss which is charged to illness is due to unnecessary length of illness on account of lack of diagnosis, faulty diagnosis, or faulty therapeutics? Loss from illness

can be tremendously reduced through the establishment of diagnostic clinics so that 100 per cent. of the people may enjoy the advantage of the most scientific medical and surgical knowledge obtainable. These diagnostic clinical stations would afford to all physicians in their daily work the same facilities as would extension courses and post-graduate work. One cannot imagine a better method of raising the standards of medical practice."

"The group plan of practice, the furnishing of diagnosis, should be made free, or supplied at a minimum cost, so that 100 per cent. of the profession may keep in daily contact with the progress of scientific medicine by taking their patients to consulting clinics. Today, in large cities, only 20 per cent. of the profession have access to scientific equipment and public diagnostic research laboratories, and these 20 per cent. have these advantages at the cost of the 80 per cent. of the public and the 80 per cent. of the profession."

"By making diagnostic clinics free, or practically so, we will enormously stimulate accurate diagnosis, systematic treatment, and preventive health work. These diagnostic clinics would be under the control of the respective health departments."

"The tremendous reduction in loss from illness occurring through the operation of industrial dispensaries suggests the extension of this principle to the schools. If full-time physicians were placed in charge of all-day dispensaries in schools, making physical examinations of all children, and prescribing for their minor ailments, using the public diagnostic clinics already referred to for confirmation of diagnoses, a similar reduction would take place in lost time from

school as has taken place in lost time from work through the operation of all-day industrial dispensaries."

"Perhaps the greatest change that has come in medical practice has been the development of the field of industrial hygiene. It is now taking the whole time of thousands of physicians, and it would seem that the beginning has just been made. No doubt this latter situation has been stimulated by workmen's compensation acts, but it is equally due to the awakening consciousness on the part of the manufacturer that the health of the worker is a definite asset in his business. Medical care in industry is not a charity: it pays good dividends."

"Now, these questions arise: What relationship will this new industrial medicine bear to public health work? Should it not have some kind of supervision from the Health Department, so that its work may be well co-ordinated? And, lastly, would not industry co-operate in making industrial hygiene compulsory?"

"This type of socialized medicine will be intensively preventive. It will discover disease in its incipency; it will prevent loss from illness. It will attack directly such problems as bad housing, venereal diseases, alcoholism, tuberculosis, and thereby make a fundamental contribution to social welfare."

"I predict that should the socialization of medicine, the raising of the standards of medical practice, along with the extension of preventive work, be consummated, our general sickness would be reduced by one-half. This, of course, is figuring on the basis of our present condition; but with the impending depletion of our medical forces the value of all these things is greatly augmented."