

OUTLINE OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN VENEZUELA

By Dr. M. LARES GABALDÓN

Chief of the Service of Information and Health Education, of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

Venezuelan public health organization had its beginning March 17, 1909, with the creation of the Public Health Commission. In November, 1911, the National Office of Health was inaugurated, with its Institute of Hygiene and its Chemistry, Bacteriology, and Parasitology Laboratories. In 1926 the first venereal disease dispensary was opened, in Caracas, and a Sanitary Engineering Commission was appointed. The first tuberculosis dispensary was opened in 1928.

In 1929 the National Health Office increased its activities, with the creation of laboratories for water analysis, physiotherapy, and radium therapy (this last constituting the beginning of the campaign against cancer). At this same time the studies of malaria and hookworm were carried forward, with the collaboration of the Rockefeller Foundation; the School Inspection Service was organized, and a "National Sanitary Conference" was set up to study national public health problems.

With the establishment of the Ministry of Public Health, Agriculture and Husbandry, in August, 1930 a transformation of Venezuelan public health organization was begun, which was intensified with the creation in 1936 of two new Ministries: that of Public Health and Social Welfare, and that of Agriculture and Husbandry. Since then sanitary services have multiplied rapidly, with the opening of tuberculosis, venereal disease and maternal and child welfare dispensaries and clinics, under their respective Divisions of the Ministry. In 1936 the Divisions of Yellow Fever Prevention and of Malaria were created, the latter having an annual budget of 3,000,000 *bolíwars*.

In 1938 the Department of Health, of the Ministry, was reorganized, and the existing Health Offices were transformed into Health Units or Centers. In the same year the School Hygiene Service, and the Divisions of Epidemiology and Statistics, Laboratories, Sanitation, and Sanitary Inspection, and Health Units, were organized, and the National Institute of Health, with its own autonomous personnel and appropriation, was founded.

Malaria.—The Malaria Division, organized in July 1936, has its headquarters in Caracas, and includes four sections: Epidemiology, Local Malaria Control and Quinine Distribution Commissions, Malaria Engineering, and Administration. A malaria survey is at present being made; it has already been completed for eight of the 20 States, and it is hoped that it will be finished by December, 1942. The most important vectors are *A. darlingi*, particularly in the interior, and *A. albimanus* on the coast. The 1,707 distributing agencies in 1,111 centers of population, distribute from 2,000 to 2,500 kg. of quinine sulfate annually, in tablets for individual treatment. Malaria control engineering projects have been carried out in 10 cities, and in Maracay the index of infection was thus reduced to zero. The establishment of a School of Malariology for physicians and engineers is now under consideration.

Tuberculosis.—Since the creation of the Tuberculosis Division in July, 1936, 23 services have been established, with tuberculosis dispensaries in the greater part of the principal cities. These attempt to solve the problem of tuberculosis care, since the number of beds available is not sufficient. The Simon Bolívar Tuberculosis Sanatorium has been functioning for a year and a half, and another large one is under construction in Mérida. The Federal Government, in cooperation with the States, has endeavored to secure the installation of tuberculosis

wards in various hospitals in the country. Venezuela's Tuberculosis Society sponsored the First National Tuberculosis Congress, in 1938, the First Tuberculosis *Jornadas* (Meetings), in 1940, and is preparing for the Second National Tuberculosis Congress, to be held in Maracaibo in 1942.

Maternal and child welfare.—The Division of Maternal and Child Welfare, organized in 1936, has among its facilities the Institute of Puericulture and 40 milk stations in Caracas, which are attended by 161 mothers and 1,387 infants daily. In 1940, 517,205 liters of milk were distributed. The Institute and centers also train physicians and nurses in puericulture. The work of the Division has been extended to rural areas, and the mortality from infant tetanus has decreased from 2,411 in 1923 to 202 in 1940. In November, 1936, the Venezuelan Child Council was created as a coordinating center, and it already has at its disposal observation clinics for children, nursery homes, and an Institute of Re-adaptation for children under 12.

Venereal disease.—The Venereal Disease Control Division operates six dispensaries in Caracas and 47 throughout the rest of the Republic. Venezuelan laws authorize compulsory treatment of venereal diseases during the contagious period.

School hygiene.—This Service, organized in 1939, at present has a staff of seven physicians, four medical specialists, seven dentists, 12 hygienists and 16 assistants, who work through 12 district centers. A number of school lunchrooms, and two children's camps, one maritime and the other inland, have been installed.

Hookworm.—Hookworm was first identified in Venezuela in 1903. Some years later the control campaign was begun, and the work is carried on with intensity throughout most of the country, including especially health education, designing of new types of latrines, setting up of shops for the manufacture of latrine parts, and so on.

Sanitary engineering.—Since its reorganization in 1936, the Division of Sanitary Engineering provides consultation service, inspection and supervision of sanitary engineering projects, and the direction of soil sanitation work.

Yellow fever.—This Service, which was set up in 1937, has devoted particular attention to the study of yellow fever immunity in Venezuela and to the organization of a viscerotomy service for control purposes in regions in which the disease has been shown to have been present in former years.

Nutrition.—A Committee on Nutrition was recently appointed, to make preliminary studies preparatory to the organization of a Division of Nutrition.

Pharmacopoeia.—A special Commission has edited the Venezuelan Pharmacopoeia, which will soon be published and will meet an urgent need.

Foods.—A scientifically trained force of inspectors exercises daily supervision over meat, milk and milk products, from the sources of supply to the retail stores, and results have been very satisfactory since the inauguration of the service four years ago. A program has been drawn up so that each technical service will be placed in the charge of specialists, providing for a decentralization of work within the Ministry. The base of action will then be each health unit, in which all the public health services of the country are represented according to the needs of each region.

Funds.—The Venezuelan public health appropriations have increased from 757,112 *bolívares* in the fiscal year 1900-01, 362,502 in 1904-1905, 487,191 in 1909-1910, and 207,137 in 1914-15, to 1,972,921 in 1919-20, 2,319,317 in 1924-25, 5,054,026 in 1929-30, 5,004,478 in 1934-35, 19,959,752 in 1939-40, and 17,959,752 in 1940-41.

Vital statistics.—General deaths: 1905, 58,343; 1909, 53,364; 1936, 57,876; 1939, 67,757; 1940, 61,557; infant deaths, 11,480, 6,422, 13,244, 17,058, and 16,234 respectively; tuberculosis, 5,270, 3,537, 3,256, 3,566, and 3,510; typhoid, 1,482, 1,231, 269, 312, and 321; malaria, 9,015, 9,268, 2,225, 1,423, and 1,261.