

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEPROSY

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY AS THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE
INTERNATIONAL LEPROSY ASSOCIATION

Postal Address: P. O. Box 606, Manila, Philippine Islands.

Office at the School of Hygiene and Public Health

Published With the Aid of the Leonard Wood Memorial

Entered at the Post Office at Manila, P. I., as second-class matter.

VOL. 1

APRIL, 1933

No. 2

EDITORIALS

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UTILIZATION OF RESOURCES

The health administration responsible for meeting, as well as possible, a leprosy situation within its jurisdiction faces a considerably more complex situation today than it did up to a decade or so ago, both as regards work to be done and the possible forces to be brought to bear. In the past, in most countries, there was nothing to be done toward control of the disease but to segregate the infectious cases in the hope of stopping transmission. The first question to be faced was whether the social, political and economic situation permitted the application of that measure, and if they did, the burden of work devolved on the government alone. If they did not, if it was necessary to let nature take its course without much interference, there was no reproach in spite of the fact that the care taken of its lepers by a country is to some extent considered an indication of the general status of that country. Certainly there was little that non-governmental agencies could do to meet the major problem.

Now the matter is more complex. Thanks to the progress which has greatly changed the status of leprosy as a medical problem, more

attention is being paid it in more places than ever before, there are more possible lines of attack, and the contrast is the more unfavorable where little or nothing is being done. Yet the problem of supporting such activities on an effective scale is no less. In fact it is rather greater, especially in these days of straitened circumstances. For these reasons if for no other those in responsible places are more and more prone to utilize all resources of energy and knowledge that can be brought to bear, in large degree or small, in material ways or otherwise, upon any phase of the problem.

Private organizations have an especially important part in this connection, in roles rather different and broader than that long since played by the most worthy Missions to Lepers. There was such an organization in Java some years ago. The Philippine Anti-Leprosy Society—now inactive, its work having been taken over and radically modified by the Red Cross—for some years carried on popular educational work, which the public realized was disinterested and independent of officialdom, and was active in following up and helping the released “ex-lepers.” This work was welcomed by the Government, which gave it whatever support and encouragement it could.

The British Empire Leprosy Relief Association and its so-called Indian Auxiliary—an all but separate organization—afford a conspicuous example of cooperation between private organizations and Governments. The Leonard Wood Memorial, the purpose of which is more closely restricted to the support of research, works on a similar basis. Perhaps the closest relationship with its Government is that of the Japanese Association for the Prevention of Leprosy, which was organized with the most intimate official support and with a plan of work that practically complemented the official activities; it proposes to do the field work while the Government carries on the isolation work.

There is, also, the not unimportant matter of utilizing resources of technical knowledge outside of the Government organization. In the Philippines, for example, though active work has been done there since the turn of the century and though the official leprosy staff is large and capable, the Government does not hesitate to seek the advice of outsiders as represented by certain of the members of a Leprosy Advisory Board created some years ago. In the Union of South Africa, where segregation has been enforced about as long as in the

Philippines, there is also a similar advisory body with non-officials in its membership.

In contrast is a situation recently seen in China. In that vast, loosely organized, highly conservative country the leprosy problem has barely been touched. The leprosaria that exist do not even pretend to do much with the larger problem. The young Central Government cannot possibly do so under present circumstances. A small but active private body, the Chinese Mission to Lepers, is attempting to make a beginning in that direction, a modest one but intelligently directed. Under the circumstances it would be thought that it would receive the fullest official encouragement, and such moral support as might be possible. At the leprosy conference held under the auspices of that group in Shanghai last October it appeared that this is not the case, that neither the Mission nor its technical advisers had been consulted with regard to certain pending leprosy legislation, and that its hope of executive endorsement had not been fulfilled.

This, however, is entirely contrary to the general tendency, a tendency which doubtless will increase greatly. With realization of the greater complexity of the problem—or at least of the variety of possible angles of attack—governments will realize more and more the possible advantages of unofficial activities. As the public at large becomes awakened to the necessity of its cooperation, and to its responsibility to relieve the Government of at least a part of this peculiar burden, agencies for this sort of work will increase and become stronger. It seems entirely probable that the future will bring, as it should, more and more collaboration between official and unofficial organizations and individuals on programs mutually arrived at.
