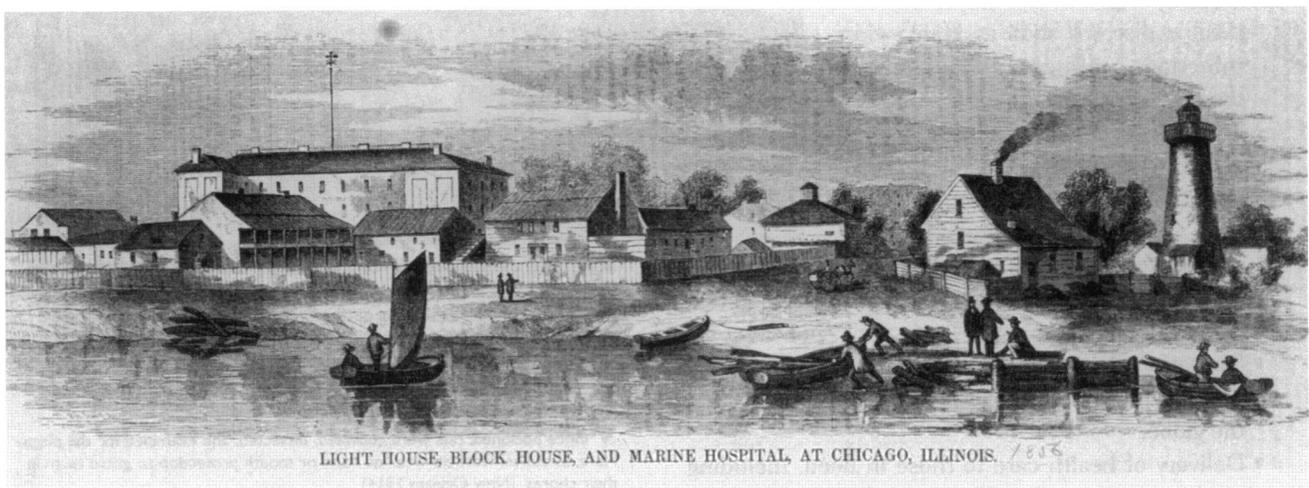


DAVID SATCHER, MD PHD

Public Health Service: On the Job for 200 Years



LIGHT HOUSE, BLOCK HOUSE, AND MARINE HOSPITAL, AT CHICAGO, ILLINOIS. 1856

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JULY 16, 1998, marks the proud occasion of the Public Health Service's 200th year as a global leader in efforts to promote health and prevent disease. Since its origins in a 1798 Act of Congress that established a prepaid hospital program for merchant seamen, PHS has stepped into the breach to provide vital services—such as quarantines, medical inspection of immigrants, education of health professionals, biomedical research—while holding fast to its primary mission of improving and protecting the nation's health.

In the process, PHS has grown from a handful of contract physicians to eight Operating Divisions within the Department of Health and Human Services with more than 50,000 health care professionals and a 6000-member all-officer Commissioned Corps (combined, these account for more than 90% of the Department's full-time personnel). PHS expenditures have grown from \$75,000 in 1798 to about \$25 billion during fiscal year 1998. With a budget representing only a modest slice of the Department's \$354-billion overall budget, PHS continues to accomplish miracles on a shoestring while Federal spending on health approaches 35% of national health expenditures and 6% of the gross domestic product.

PHS contributions have spurred the dramatic progress of public health and medicine since the Civil War; these have included:

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- Nobel Prize-winning research on the leading killers of our age, including cardiovascular disease, injuries, cancer, and HIV/AIDS, together with public health education based on research results, for example, in the campaign to achieve a smoke-free society.
- Pioneering regulation to ensure the safety and efficacy of the nation's food supply, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices.
- Cutting-edge surveillance of communicable diseases such as Hanta virus infections, influenza, Legionnaire's disease, and tropical parasitic diseases and successful campaigns against smallpox, polio, measles, and malaria.
- Grants for health professions education, construction of hospitals, and medical centers, and assistance to the states that have made the United States health care system tops in the world.
- Sanitation programs to bring clean water and sewage disposal to tens of thousands at home and around the globe.
- Delivery of health care to those in need, including vital programs to make treatment for mental illness and substance addictions more widely available.

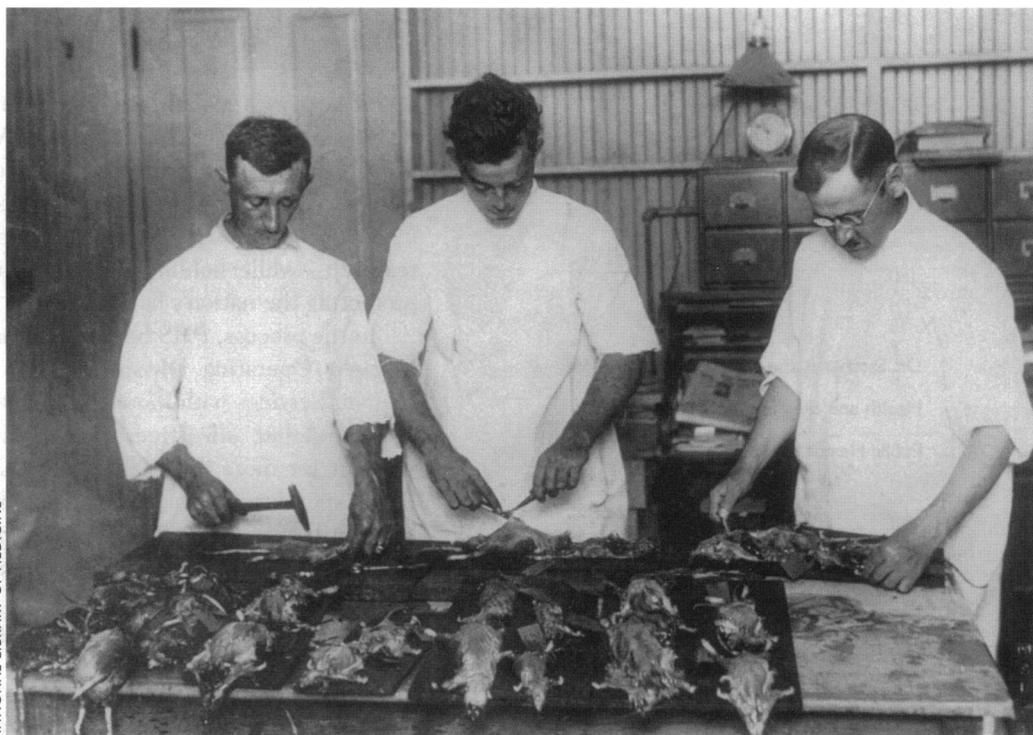
Since 1965, maternal mortality in this country has been cut in half. Age-adjusted death rates are down for leading causes of death such as heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, pneumonia/influenza, diabetes, and liver disease. Almost half of these gains can be attributed to public health measures. As the number of underserved people grows and expenditures for health care remain constrained by managed care and tight government budgets, PHS more than ever is a sure bet to carry our nation into the next century. ■



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▲ Assuring the public's health over two centuries has required PHS staff to undertake many an unpleasant, and often unusual, task. Here, workers are preparing rat poison during one of the several campaigns against the bubonic plague. (1915)

▼ Once poisoned, rats were collected, dissected, and examined for the plague. Here, as above, workers wear no hand or mouth protection to guard them in their chores. (New Orleans, 1914)



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► Typhoid fever, attributable to poor sanitary conditions, was a major cause of illness in the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in rural areas. Here an entire family receives inoculations against typhoid fever. (circa 1930)



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▼ The fight against the spread of communicable diseases through research and immunization programs has always been one of the Public Health Service's major goals. These "modern" mobile immunization clinics combined a loudspeaker system with vaccines for hard-to-reach populations (circa 1955).

Can anyone identify this well-known public health doctor in his early years? (E-mail your best guess to <phr@nlm.nih.gov> or write to us.)



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