

The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Pan American Health Organization

(Editor's Note—A special report on the achievements of the Pan American Health Organization will appear in the November-December 1977 issue of Public Health Reports.)

"The time has come when common action should be taken. Trade and a higher civilization both demand that we should attend to this matter now. Our American republics have an opportunity to inaugurate a new system for the advancement of civilization. Tropical and semi-tropical countries are not necessarily unhealthy. Their unhealthfulness is not due to climate, but to faulty sanitation, or lack of it . . . , and since in the catalogue of crime and disease no cause thereof is greater than vicious and insanitary surroundings or neglect of sanitary laws, it would seem that if measures, such as are presented in the memorandum, can be made practicable and enforced, no achievement would be greater by the Pan American Congress than this."

These are the words of Dr. Walter Wyman, Surgeon General of the U.S. Marine Hospital Service, (today's U.S. Public Health Service), to the Chairman of the U.S. Delegation to the International Conference of American States in October 1901. The major issue of this conference and succeeding ones in 1902 was development of an international agreement in sanitation, especially for major commercial seaport cities. And so the realization of the degree to which the countries of the Region are affected by and dependent on one another began to take the form of concrete action.

In 1902, through resolutions of the First General International Sanitary Convention of the American Republics, the International Sanitary Bureau was founded with a budget of \$5,000 to "lend its best aid and experience toward the widest possible protection of the public health of each of the said republics in order that disease may be eliminated, and that commerce between said republics may be facilitated."

The development and achievements of the Bureau, known today as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), warrant special notice on this, the Organization's 75th Anniversary.

Over the years PAHO has become the independent health agency of the Organization of American States and its Secretariat, the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, serves as the Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization. Today, PAHO experts serve the Member Governments by focusing attention on priority health problems, stimulating action and cooperating in the establishment of programs and their implementation in a variety of areas related to health. A outstanding example of the Organization's programs in this hemisphere is the important role it played in the eradication of smallpox in the Americas. The benefits to the United States alone due to the reduced threat of this disease have been estimated at \$143 million annually. The vitality and flexibility of the Organization are evident from the trend of its current activities which are focused on today's needs in emerging countries combined with financial restrictions on the Organization and world-wide inflation.

The governments of this hemisphere continue to depend on PAHO to provide the forum by which they can meet and discuss mutual problems and approaches to solutions and through which the hemisphere may be represented in a cohesive fashion in other regions of the world. The Fourth Special Meeting of Ministers of Health called by PAHO this fall will enable the Member-Governments to discuss progress and problems in the extension of primary health care coverage to under- and unserved populations. The outcome of this meeting will also serve as the basis for the regional document to be presented at the WHO-sponsored meeting on extension of coverage in Alma Ata, Soviet Union, in September 1978.

The Pan American Health Organization has not only survived these 75 years, it has served and continues to serve a vital purpose for the countries of the Americas. The United States is proud to be a member. It is with great pleasure and pride in its past accomplishments as well as with great expectations for its future that we extend congratulations to the Director and staff of the Organization in their 75th Anniversary year.

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