

review

Selected Papers of Joseph W. Mountin

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Selected papers of Joseph W. Mountin, M.D.
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THE PUBLICATION of "Selected Papers of Joseph W. Mountin" by the Memorial Committee is perhaps the finest memorial and tribute possible to a great public health man.

In this historical document, students and scholars of public health can see clearly the phenomenal growth of public health in this century.

Beautifully planned, organized, and edited, the book holds great value for the careful reader or the skimmer. Each chapter, and frequently each paper, is accompanied by editorial comment and quotations that highlight that particular subject matter. Key words, ideas, and concepts throughout the multiplicity of subject matter stand out and give emphasis through repetition to the character of the author. These are things Joseph Mountin felt to be important in public health. These are the things that made him a public health statesman, ahead of his time but with feet solidly upon the ground.

Each reader may pick for himself the threads that run consistently throughout the fabric of these papers. For example, there is the thread of change: "divine discontent with the traditional, with past or present performance and concepts . . . public health as a dynamic moving force in a changing social order, an emerging science . . . changing concepts . . . changing patterns . . . adaptation to meet the changing needs . . . adjustment to meet new situations."

It is popular today to include gerontology in our list of public health responsibilities, but Dr. Mountin set down forcefully years ago

what our responsibility for the aging is and how we may go about meeting this responsibility. He warns us of the dangers of not conforming to the "orthodox" principles in public health—"How free we seem; how fettered fast we are"—but advises that we study scientifically the health needs of our community so that we may promote and conserve its health most efficiently. This is the spirit of scientific inquiry, the spirit of scientific freedom, that challenges the best minds in any profession.

A prominent thread is Dr. Mountin's concern for the future of public health. Glance through the titles of his papers: "Planning for Public Health," "The Evolving Pattern of Tomorrow's Health," "The Future of Public Health Nursing," "Organizing for the Newer Public Health Programs." It is not enough to consolidate our gains, to live on past accomplishments, to hold the line. We must be pushing back the frontiers of knowledge in community health, our distinctive area of competence. The "pioneering spirit" is what is needed, and that spirit requires courage—courage, conviction, and dedication of a high order—for pioneering in health today is more adventurous than was the land pioneering of our forefathers, for we live in the wealthiest and therefore the most conservative nation upon the face of the earth. Dr. Mountin's papers demonstrate this courage as his life demonstrated its dangers. Note the weight he constantly places upon trends, the scientific prognosis of what the future holds for us in health status, health needs, problems, and opportunities.

Another thread is evaluation. Dr. Mountin does not discard programs and activities because they are traditional, but he does emphasize evaluation—constant critical analysis of any program, old or new, to determine its effectiveness, and exploration and research in administrative methods to see if there is a better way to meet community needs. He is not satisfied with scientific diagnosis, prognosis, prescription, or treatment of community health problems. He wants constant scientific supervision and followup. This is the spirit of a great public health physician whose concern is for his patient, the community, and not merely the science of his profession of public health.