

Training New Sanitarians in Virginia

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EVERY community in Virginia today is served by an organized health department. Ten years ago such services were available to only one-half the State. Concomitant with this rapid growth in local health units has been the demand for broader services to match a higher standard of living and changes in the social structure.

The expansion of both health units and programs imposed upon the public health administrative force of the State the problem of recruiting personnel to fill the new positions and to provide the varied services anticipated by the public.

Especially difficult was the recruitment of enough sanitarians to staff the new jobs. Furthermore, turnover in this field often exceeded replacements, and many positions remained vacant for extended periods. The inadequacy of the staff and recruiting program of the Virginia Department of Health in coping with the situation prompted the search for a solution.

Early in 1952 the Virginia Department of Health launched a study of its recruiting and training needs. Training programs and salary scales for sanitarians in other States were reviewed, and the resources of industry, universities, and the Public Health Service were used. The State then designed a recruiting and training program that was geared to its own requirements.

Two major characteristics of the program are, first, flexibility to facilitate modifications

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and, second, tying in training with recruiting. Fused with this process is the understanding of the need for frequent salary changes.

The administrative responsibility for the inservice training program is assigned to the Virginia Department of Health. A section of sanitation training was established in the division of local health services to plan, coordinate, and evaluate the training. Program costs are borne by the State health department, with county health departments paying a percentage of trainee salaries. Recruiting is centralized at the personnel bureau of the State health department.

The basic structure of the program involves the following major stages:

- Recruiting and indoctrinating new sanitarians.
- Supervising new sanitarians while on the job.
- Giving new sanitarians 12 weeks of basic fundamentals in sanitation.
- Conducting topical short refresher courses for experienced sanitarians.
- Offering academic study leading to the master of public health degree for qualified, experienced sanitarians.

Recruiting and Indoctrination

A job description, offering an attractive salary range, limits recruits to college graduates preferably with a major in the physical or biological sciences. Throughout indoctrination, recruits are screened by tests, interviews, and followup of references in order to weed out those unsuited. The personnel bureau carefully explains the entire inservice program to the applicant, who, on his acceptance of the

position, enters a 6-month probationary period. He receives full salary and living expenses during indoctrination and away-from-home assignments. The trainee's services are subject to immediate termination either voluntarily or by his employer.

On his first day of employment, the recruit is sent to 1 of 4 indoctrination centers located in county health departments, staffed with local workers and jointly operated by the State and county health departments. The four departments were selected to serve as official indoctrination centers because they are staffed by trained personnel engaged in broad, working sanitation programs. One sanitarian in each official center is appointed trainer, and his salary is increased for this service.

During indoctrination the recruit is observed closely as he follows a supervised course designed to fit his individual abilities. In this course he is introduced to the overall public health field. Public health philosophy, principles, programs, practices, and organization and administration are gradually unfolded for him. He observes community organizations, and government and nonofficial agencies and their impact on public health practices. Besides learning the value of teamwork in public health, he can develop his skills and techniques through supervised observation and practice in some sanitarian activities.

At the same time, the trainer studies and evaluates his progress and potential, keeping careful records and making periodic reports. The recruit may stay at the center from 4 to 6 weeks, depending on his progress, after which he enters the next phase of training in the field. Many recruits do not measure up to expectations during indoctrination and are therefore eliminated at this point; 20 percent of recruits in 1956 proved unsuited for further study in the program.

Supervision While on the Job

The new employee is next assigned to a job in the field where he is closely guided by his health director and supervisors until he demonstrates his ability to work with minimum help. This is his proving period in which he must show enough growth, potential, and per-

formance to warrant ending the probationary period of employment. At this stage his tenure is usually from 4 to 12 months.

Twelve Weeks' Sanitation Course

Finally, the trainee is given a course in basic sanitation offered in a centrally located field training station in one of the local health departments. This course, limited to 16 students in a session, is planned for the inexperienced sanitarian with 4 to 12 months of field practice in sanitation. The trainee lives with others in his group in a nearby hotel throughout the 12 weeks. This stage of training may prove the most profitable because he continues his study of sanitation in off-duty hours through group discussions with other trainees and through project assignments.

One director and an assistant staff the field training station, for which teaching personnel are drawn from State and local health departments, private industry, and nearby colleges.

Basic fundamentals in the component parts of sanitation are taught along with functional program operation. Methods of teaching follow a pattern of classroom lectures, conferences, planned field observation, then practice under supervision. Trainees are graded on performance and accomplishment. To measure trainee growth and to improve instruction, the testing criteria of the American Public Health Association are used in addition to other materials. Those who graduate from the 12 weeks' course become full-fledged sanitarians, capable of handling their assignments with a minimum of direction. Thus far 124 candidates have successfully completed the course. But training opportunities have not stopped.

Refresher and Advanced Training

To maintain organization esprit and keep the experienced sanitarian stimulated and abreast of developments in sanitation, short refresher courses are held in selected components of the subject every year. Lasting from 2 to 10 days, the courses are offered at locations within commuting distance and are limited to 30 participants for each class. Usually the teaching

staff is drawn from the same sources as for the 12-week basic training course.

Topical refresher, short courses have been held in such sanitation components as water supplies and sewage disposal, insect and rodent control, sanitary milk control, food service, swimming pools, and advanced practices in supervision. More than 100 experienced sanitarians, including supervisory staff, have attended some or all of these refresher courses.

The final stage of training is professional study in a recognized school of public health leading to a master of public health degree. Provisions have been made for a limited number of qualified sanitarians to pursue this study.

Training Accomplishments

We have not as yet discovered or developed sufficiently accurate criteria for evaluating results of the program, but certain available data indicate general trends.

Job turnover in sanitarian personnel has decreased markedly since the program's inception. The department lost 7 percent by resignation

of sanitarians in 1952 against 32.7 percent in 1951. The loss remained constant at about 10 percent during 1953-54. Late in 1955 resignations increased, and job turnover climbed to 18 percent. This was immediately met in 1956 with small salary increases.

The morale of the sanitarians is higher: They appear to be more satisfied and secure in their positions, want the training, and avail themselves of every opportunity to attend courses. It is no longer necessary to encourage or compel their attendance.

Health directors reflect their approval of the program by cooperating fully in its support. At first they preferred utilizing the services of the new employee to sparing him for training. Now however they demand that the sanitarian be trained. Finally, complaints from the public concerning sanitation services have decreased.

Although we hesitate to state that our training program is complete, we are convinced that certain segments of it are essential to meet the needs of our health projects within the State.

Concentration of Carbon Tetrachloride

A standard prescribing the maximum acceptable concentration of carbon tetrachloride in the atmosphere of working places was approved and published by the American Standards Association in June 1957.

The Public Health Service acted as endorsing sponsor for the standard and recommended its approval. Public Health Service participants in the development of the standard were Dr. W. F. von Oettingen of the National Institutes of Health, who served as chairman of the subcommittee engaged in the preliminary work, and Dr. H. E. Stokinger of the Bureau of State Services.

This standard is one of a series prepared by Committee Z37 of the American Standards Association. The committee coordinates information on air contaminants and establishes acceptable allowable concentrations, which are of use in developing methods for controlling such contamination.

Copies of the carbon tetrachloride standard, known as American Standard Maximum Acceptable Concentration of Carbon Tetrachloride, may be obtained for 50 cents from the American Standards Association, Inc., 70 East 45th Street, New York 17, N. Y.