



Information Systems in Public Health

WITH THE INCREASING variety and complexity of the health services that public health workers now plan and administer, they have been looking into other areas of public administration for techniques to expand the quality of their performance. Opportunities for the exchange of opinions and ideas are increasing. In New York City annual conferences, sponsored jointly by the Public Health Association of New York City and the New York Area Chapter of the American Statistical Association, have been forums for interchange between two professional groups. Each conference is focused on a particular topic.

The theme for the 1967 meeting, held May 23–24, was “Information Systems for Administration and Planning in Business, Government, and Public Health.” A variety of systems and practical programs were reviewed in 12 sessions. Emphasis was on application of information system technology in many substantive areas. The speakers and discussants have broad experience in installing, operating, and interpreting the output of information systems.

The 11 papers selected for this section illustrate the operation of health information and reporting systems now in use. Few who receive the weekly report and other tabulations of the surveillance system of the National Communicable Disease Center, Public Health Service, are aware of the complex procedures needed to

maintain standards of accuracy and timeliness. New York City’s weekly report of mortality and morbidity is as renowned as the record for 8 million New Yorkers.

The Connecticut Tumor Registry provides the most nearly complete index of cases of cancer. Data from that State have been the subject of useful investigations into the natural history of cancer and the results of therapy. The Parkinson Information Center and the New York City Poison Control Center have grown to fill needs for timely information in their respective fields.

Research of the du Pont Company’s medical department demonstrates the epidemiologic studies which can be accomplished with a well-functioning personnel and health information system. Recent developments in hospital data systems, illustrated in the experiences of the Veterans’ Administration and of the Community Profile Data Center of the Public Health Service, have grown in response to new government programs.

These papers contain a useful mix of theoretical information and guidance in “how-to-do-it yourself.” The section also includes two papers dealing with the development and applications of health-related information systems.—DR. MORTON D. SCHWEITZER, *associate professor of epidemiology, Columbia University School of Public Health and Administrative Medicine, and coordinator of this special section.*