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The Pan American Sanitary Bureau

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THE growing importance of the relations of the peoples of each American Republic with those of every other makes it incumbent upon all Americans, North, Central and South, to become fully informed of these relations and to be informed particularly with regard to questions of an international character. The object of this paper is to sketch briefly the origin and development of the work of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and the closely related Pan American Sanitary Conferences.

The Pan American Sanitary Bureau is a permanent international health organization in which all of the American republics are represented and to the support and maintenance of which they all contribute funds in proportion to their populations. The bureau is concerned in maintaining and improving the health of all of the people of these 21 American republics and also in preventing the occurrence and spread of transmissible diseases in international commerce, particularly the international commerce of the republics concerned. It is composed of members chosen from different American republics, who meet periodically, and of a force of employees who, under the supervision of the Director of the Bureau, are daily occupied in carrying on its work. Its home is in the building of the Pan American Union in Washington, D. C., and it is the executive organ of the Pan American Sanitary Conferences.

The Pan American Sanitary Conferences are composed of delegates from all of the American republics, who meet once in 2 to 4 years; elect the officers and members of the Directing Council of the Sanitary Bureau; and spend from 1 to 2 weeks in discussing and resolving international sanitary problems, particularly of the Western Hemisphere, and local sanitary problems of general interest. Since

their inception in 1902 there have been 8 Pan American Sanitary Conferences held in various American Republics.

For many years prior to the creation of the Pan American Sanitary Conferences and the Sanitary Bureau, statesmen, meeting in international conferences, treating of questions of a general nature, blindly attempted the solution of the vexing questions of international quarantines and the spread of such diseases as plague, cholera and yellow fever in international commerce, without, however, being able to improve general health conditions or obviate the drastic quarantines which would invariably follow the appearance of one of these diseases in some important commercial port. Gradually there dawned on the members of these general conferences the fact that the protection of the public health, involving as it does the prevention of the spread of communicable diseases, is a matter which must be dealt with by men who are specially trained in such work.

This opinion was crystallized and expressed in Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Resolutions of the Second (general) Pan American Conference of American Republics, which met in Mexico City in 1902. These resolutions provided for the holding of international (Pan American) sanitary conferences; for the establishment and perpetuation of an executive body dependent upon these conferences—the Pan American Sanitary Bureau—and for funds for its maintenance, each American republic contributing to its support, according to the number of its inhabitants.

The officers and members of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (known as the Directing Council) are elected by the Pan American Sanitary Conferences. The members of this Council, as chosen by the last conference, which was held in Lima, Peru, in October, 1927, are as follows:

Honorary Director, Dr. Carlos Enrique Paz Soldan, Professor of Hygiene in the Faculty of Medicine, Lima, Peru; *Director*, Dr. Hugh S. Cumming, Surgeon General, U. S. Public Health Service, Washington, D. C.; *Vice-Director*, Dr. Mario G. Lebrado, Director of "Las Animas" Hospital and Chief of the Section of Epidemiology, National Department of Health and Welfare, Havana, Cuba; *Secretary*, Dr. Sebastián Lorente, Director of Health of the Republic of Peru, Lima, Peru; *Members*: Dr. Solón Núñez F., Secretary of State for Health and Social Welfare, Republic of Costa Rica, San José, Costa Rica; Dr. Ramón Báez Soler, Sub-Secretary of State for Health and Welfare, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Dr. Justo F. González, Professor of Hygiene in the Faculty of Medicine, Montevideo, Uruguay; Dr. João Pedro de Albuquerque, Director of Quarantines, National Department of Health, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

It is not possible, in a brief article, to give a detailed history of the work of the various Pan American Sanitary Conferences or of the Pan

American Sanitary Bureau. It should be recalled, however, that the first conference was organized in Washington in November, 1902; that it effected permanent organization by electing the members of the Sanitary Bureau, the first permanent organization of its kind; and that it cast into discard all previous quarantine measures directed against yellow fever, voting to base future measures for the control of this disease on the fact, which had recently been demonstrated, that yellow fever is conveyed in nature only by the bite of an infected mosquito.

The Second Pan American Conference also met in Washington, in 1905. This body drafted and approved a sanitary treaty, or convention, which, in great measure, standardized international quarantine procedure in the Western Hemisphere, and which was not without effect on quarantine practices, in European and Asiatic countries. This treaty was known as the Washington Convention, and was the precursor of the present Pan American Sanitary Code, adopted at the Seventh Pan American Sanitary Conference in Havana, Cuba, in 1924.

The Third Sanitary Conference provided for the establishment of relations with the International Office of Public Hygiene, of Paris, and a system of coöperation between the two offices has been developed for the mutual interchange of information regarding sanitary conditions and the presence of quarantinable diseases in the principal ports and countries of the world. This information is exchanged by cable, and is, immediately upon receipt, released to the health authorities of all countries concerned.

The Fifth International Conference of American Republics, meeting in Chile in 1923, charged the Sanitary Bureau with the preparation of an International Sanitary Code. This was done and the code was approved by the Seventh Pan American Sanitary Conference at Havana, Cuba, in 1924.

The Sixth Sanitary Conference, held in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1920, authorized the publication of the *Pan American Sanitary Bulletin*, a monthly journal of public health, printed in Spanish, Portuguese and French. This bulletin circulates among health officers and others connected with public health work throughout the American republics, but chiefly in Latin America.

In addition, the Seventh Conference made the Pan American Sanitary Bureau the central coördinating agency and the general collection and distribution center of sanitary information to and from the American republics. In order to carry out this work, the Sanitary Bureau was authorized to designate representatives to visit and confer with the sanitary authorities of the various signatory governments on public health matters. Previous and subsequent authorizations provide for

traveling representatives to engage in such special coöperative work as may be agreed upon at the various conferences, limited only by the available funds and the expressed wishes of the coöperating governments.

Under a resolution adopted by the Fifth International Congress of American States, the Pan American Sanitary Bureau is authorized to call together in Washington, from time to time, the Directors of Health of the various American republics. The first such meeting was held in Washington in September, 1926, under the auspices of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau. Its chief work was the preparation of a program for the Eighth Sanitary Conference which was held in Lima the following year. The Directors of Health will meet again in Washington in 1931.

In addition to the duties which have been mentioned, the Sanitary Bureau publishes the reports of the proceedings of the sanitary conferences, and acts as a consulting bureau or source of information for health departments of the various republics. The way in which the office functions as a consulting bureau can best be illustrated by concrete examples. The following instances show the very close coöperation maintained.

1. A given food product manufactured in one republic and extensively sold in another caused considerable uneasiness with regard to its value and safety, and the propriety of its further use was questioned. The Sanitary Bureau was asked for pertinent information with regard to its production and composition. This information was obtained and promptly forwarded to the Director of Health of the country where the article was being sold.

2. After many years of absolute freedom from smallpox, this disease was re-imported into one of the American republics. Seven cases developed, which were promptly isolated, and an intensive campaign of vaccination and re-vaccination was immediately begun; the Director of Health was importuned to close schools, theatres and other public assembling places. He cabled the Sanitary Bureau for an expression of opinion with regard to the necessity for such drastic action. The opinion was expressed that the measures already employed, if thoroughly carried out, should be sufficient to control the disease, and that it was believed to be safe to await further developments. No further cases occurred from this outbreak.

3. At the request of a European government, the Office International d'Hygiene Publique cabled the Sanitary Bureau, asking if a reported increase of plague in a certain American Republic materially increased the danger from this disease to trans-Atlantic ports, and, further, the question was asked whether or not vessels sailing from the country infected could be considered safe upon arrival. The opinion was expressed by the Sanitary Bureau that the increase in plague did not materially increase the danger to trans-Atlantic ports. The Office International was further informed that, while outgoing measures were being enforced in the infected country, conditions were such that, if vessels arrived at trans-Atlantic ports with evidence of living rats on board, fumigation might reasonably be required of such

vessels. Three days later a vessel arrived at a European port from the country in question and, upon fumigation, 7 plague-infected rats were found.

The tour of duty of Dr. John D. Long and that of Dr. C. R. Eskey, Traveling Representative and Epidemiologist, respectively, of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, are indicative of another type of coöperation in public health work. Dr. Long during the past two years has visited most of the capitals of the member republics. He confers with the National Directors of Health and with other high officials and aids them in solving sanitary problems of general interest, and advises with regard to needed legislation and public health organization and administration. During the past several months Dr. Long and Dr. Eskey have been actively coöperating with the authorities of the Republic of Ecuador in making epidemiological studies of, and in carrying on an intensive campaign against, bubonic plague. They will shortly transfer their activities to Peru where it is expected that similar work will be undertaken.

In conclusion, it may be said that, as a result of the work of the International Sanitary Conferences and the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, during the last 25 years, a better understanding has been brought about between the health authorities of the republics of America, thereby removing the necessity for the drastic quarantines which were so common in the early part of the present century, and at the same time affording greater protection of the public health. This spirit of coöperation has also fostered and directly aided in the extermination of quarantinable diseases in many ports and places where such diseases were formerly endemic.



Desert of the Lions—The Convent, Mexico City