

NEW HEALTH OFFICERS *for* SYRACUSE,
CATTARAUGUS COUNTY *and* NEW YORK CITY



DURING the past summer, New York City, scene of the metropolitan, Syracuse, scene of the urban, and Cattaraugus County, scene of the rural health demonstration, installed new and full-time health officers into their respective health administrations. Dr. Shirley W. Wynne, former Deputy Commissioner, became Commissioner of Health of the City of New York on August 17, 1928. On August first, Dr. George C. Ruhland had been inducted into office as Health Commissioner of Syracuse, having served as deputy for some years previously. On September seventh, Dr. Reginald M. Atwater, having been for over eight months acting county health officer, was formally appointed Health Officer of Cattaraugus County.

In all these instances, the entire salaries of these administrators are paid from local public funds. For many years New York City has maintained a full-time health officer; and Dr. Wynne is one of a number of able executives who have served the City in this capacity. Cattaraugus County, which in 1923 appointed the County's and the State's first county health officer, on January 1, 1928, made provision in its local budget for payment of the entire salary of this official.* Dr. Atwater is the first health administrator to serve under this arrangement. Similarly, through his appointment on August first, Dr. Ruhland has the distinction of being the first health officer of Syracuse and the first in any city in New York State outside of New York City to be required by the terms of his appointment to give his full time to his official duties.

Commenting upon these appointments, Dr. Matthias

* One-half of this expenditure is returned from the State Treasury under the provisions of Chapter 278, of the laws of 1924, whereby one-half a County's expenditures for health work are returned in the form of State aid.



DR. MATTHIAS NICOLL, JR.,
*Commissioner of Health of the
State of New York*

Nicoll, Jr., State Commissioner of Health, said that in his opinion "the most important events which have marked the progress of public health in this State during the past few years has been the establishment of the county health unit, with a full-time qualified health officer as administrator. The establishment of such a unit in Cattaraugus County is now to be followed by one in the county of Suffolk. In both instances, the county authorities are assuming responsibility for the payment of adequate salaries to the county health officers. In the City of Syracuse the same

principle has been adopted, which it is to be hoped will serve as an example to other large cities of the State and inevitably be followed by constructive, co-ordinated and continuous administration of municipal public health. In the City of New York the Mayor has shown wisdom and understanding of the importance of public health work by first appointing to the office of Commissioner of Health a man thoroughly qualified by experience and training—Dr. Louis I. Harris—and, upon his recent resignation, appointing to the vacancy the Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Shirley W. Wynne, whose qualifications are not open to dispute.

"The progress of public health work seems at times to be very slow and, not infrequently, discouraging," Dr. Nicoll

concluded. "This is especially true of local public health administration, but taken as a whole, as observed by Dr. Hermann M. Biggs, it never goes backward. Fundamental principles, essential to its betterment, have come to be so generally recognized that they are certain to be adopted sooner or later through the pressure of public opinion."

As a member of the New York City Health Department, Dr. Wynne has been interested in the Bellevue-Yorkville Health Demonstration since its origin. He believes that the undertaking has an "important place in the health work of the City. Because of the necessity of setting up a yearly budget which must be spent in accordance with definite rules and regulations, and because of the necessity of city government employees being appointed from Civil Service lists, it is difficult," he says, "to inaugurate new functions and almost impossible to undertake experimental work in health administration. Therefore, a demonstration such as the Bellevue - Yorkville, financed by private funds, affords the health officials of the City an unusual opportunity to try out new methods.

"It was the purpose of the demonstration not just to throw an additional force into the district because, with the expenditure of \$200,000 a year in any district, health conditions can be improved; but it

DR. SHIRLEY W. WYNNE,
*Commissioner of Health of the
City of New York.*





DR. GEORGE C. RUHLAND,
*First full-time Commissioner of Health
of Syracuse.*

was to enable the Department of Health to bring about closer co-operation of the official and unofficial agencies and to eliminate overlapping in their work.

"I propose to use the demonstration area as a laboratory in which new methods may be tried out," continues Commissioner Wynne. "I have already planned two definite changes in our present methods which, beginning October first, will be given a trial in this area, and if they prove satisfactory, they will be as rapidly as possible extended to the entire City.

"We have long discussed the pros and cons of local health centers. Such centers have many advantages and not a few disadvantages. Here is an opportunity under most favorable conditions to give the health center idea a thorough and impartial trial," Dr. Wynne says.

Dr. Ruhland's appointment came upon the resignation of Dr. Herman G. Weiskotten, who in retiring said that "the position entailed great responsibilities which were vital to the best interests of the City and that the position should be filled by a competent full-time public health administrator." His responsibilities as Dean of the College of Medicine of Syracuse University were such that "he could not hope to do them justice and continue as Commissioner of Health,"

stated Dr. Weiskotten in tendering his resignation.

Appointment of a full-time health officer is an arrangement "that should have been made many years ago, even though it involved a necessary increase in salary," said the Syracuse Herald editorially. "If the heads of other municipal departments, including of course, the Police and Fire Departments, are bound to devote their undivided attention to the city's needs and interests in their respective lines, surely the same rule should be applied to the official who is held responsible for municipal sanitation and hygiene, or more comprehensively, for the public health so far as it can be protected by vigilantly enforced laws and ordinances."

Dr. Atwater, who was formerly on the faculty of the Harvard School of Public Health, succeeded Dr. Stephen A. Douglass who resigned as county health officer to become medical field secretary of the National Tuberculosis Association. In a state where no such measure had been previously tried, to have demonstrated in six years the practicability and desirability of using the country as a public health administrative unit has been well worth all the Cattaraugus County Health Demonstration has cost, in the opinion of Dr. Atwater. "Rural health can be more adequately protected when the unit is an area larger than the township or

DR. REGINALD M. ATWATER,
*Full-time Health Officer of Cattaraugus
County.*



village. Now that this fact has been demonstrated within the State of New York, the northeastern portion of the United States is going to see the proof of this fact and, it may be hoped, will profit thereby," Dr. Atwater believes.

"The demonstration has served in Cattaraugus to stimulate public interest in, and to carry the burden of support for, the County health administration during the years when its usefulness was becoming apparent to the citizens of the County. The people of the County and the officials are of one accord in their intention of permanently carrying on this undertaking at local expense. Progress in health organization has recently been very rapid in the large cities. It is easy for those in the cities to criticize the belated country districts and their health organization. It is to the credit of the rural people in Cattaraugus County that they have in innumerable ways signified their interest in and, indeed, their enthusiasm for an adequate local health service."

