

# ANNOTATIONS

## ACTIVITIES OF A RURAL HEALTH OFFICER

STUDIES of the daily activities of the staff of a rural health department, which have been conducted by the Office of Studies of Public Health Methods, United States Public Health Service, are unique and provide data which are basic to a better understanding of rural health work and to the evaluation of the efficacy and adequacy of the health services. In a series of articles,<sup>1</sup> data on the activities of the sanitation officer, the two nurses and the health officer of the Brunswick-Greensville Bicounty Health Department in Virginia have been discussed. This is the entire staff, except for one part-time clerk, and it is typical of many rural health units throughout the country. These analyses utilize data obtained through the cooperation of the staff members who kept special records of their activities. The findings are of unusual interest to all persons concerned with the problem of adequate health service to rural areas.

Some of the findings of the report on the activities of the health officer of the Brunswick-Greensville Health Department are reprinted below. His work was considered in two general categories, namely, personal or professional services and administrative activities, such as correspondence, working on records and reports, planning the program, conferring with officials and staff members, et cetera. All work was recorded for a period of ten months.

### EXTENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP SERVICES RENDERED BY THE HEALTH OFFICER

*Number and Color of Individuals Served.* During the period of the

<sup>1</sup> Dean, J. O. and Mountin, J. W.: Job Analysis of a Rural Sanitation Officer. *Public Health Reports*, United States Public Health Service, December 21, 1934, 49, No. 51; McIver, Pearl: Public Health Nursing in a Bicounty Health Department. *Public Health Reports*, United States Public Health Service, April 5, 1935, 50, No. 14; Dean, J. O.: Job Analysis of a Rural Health Officer. Brunswick-Greensville Health Administration Studies No. 6. *Public Health Reports*, United States Public Health Service, December 13, 1935, 50, No. 50.

	COLOR		TOTAL
	White	Colored	
Population of health district	14,253	19,621	33,874
Number served by health officer	1,431	2,559	3,992 <sup>1</sup>
Per cent served by health officer	10.0	13.0	11.8

<sup>1</sup>Includes two persons of unknown color.

Table 2. Number and percentage of population served by health officer in a period of 10 months according to color.

study, records were obtained showing some type of service to 3,992 individuals, approximately 12 per cent of the entire population. These individuals represented 2,496 families, or about 37 per cent of all families within the area. A larger percentage of the colored population was served than of the white group. The number and percentage of persons seen in each group are listed in Table 2.

*Place of Service.* The principal activity of the health officer from the standpoint of numbers served was diphtheria control. Most of this was Schick testing and was done in the schools. Approximately 90 per cent of those the health officer served were seen in the school, about 7 per cent in the health department offices, 4 per cent in the homes, and 1 per cent in other places.

A great majority of the individuals were recorded as receiving but one visit; therefore very few of them were seen except at the place of first contact. Only fifty-five individuals were seen at two or more places. The number and percentage of persons seen in school, office, home, and other places are given in Table 3.

It is of interest to note that while 64 per cent of all those served by the health officer were colored, of those seen in either home or office only 33 per cent were colored.

*Age Group Served.* As already pointed out, most of the contacts were

Table 3. Number and percentage of persons served by health officer in school, health department offices, home, and other places.

	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS SERVED BY HEALTH OFFICER
TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS SEEN <sup>1</sup>	3,992	100.0
Seen in school	3,583	89.8
Seen in health department offices	268	6.7
Seen in home	151	3.8
Seen in other places	46	1.2

<sup>1</sup>Fifty-four persons seen at two places; one person seen at three places.

made in the schools in connection with diphtheria-prevention activities. While a large part of the publicity attending this work was directed toward reaching children below school age, school children (6-15 years of age) constituted over 81 per cent of all contacts. There were no accurate figures available on the population according to age groups at the time of the study. However, on the basis of figures given in the United States Census of 1930, population estimates have been made. The percentage of persons in each age group receiving service from the health officer was as follows: Infants 4.5, preschool 5.8, school 33.9, adult 2.4.

*Types of Service Rendered and Number of Contacts Made with Each Individual.* . . . Approximately 90 per cent of the 3,992 individuals served by the health officer received some type of immunization service, 5 per cent were visited in the interest of communicable disease control, 6 per cent were seen for either medical care or material relief, and less than 2 per cent were visited for other purposes. There is some duplication of individuals in these percentages, but the amount is small, since only 100 individuals sought more than one type of service. . . . Of those who were recipients of an immunization service (excluding the reading of Schick tests), approximately 72 per cent were seen but one time. Of those seen for communicable disease control and medical or material relief, 65 and 63 per cent, respectively, had one visit.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

Much of the attention of the health officer was occupied by activities which were of an administrative character as distinguished from those involving an element of personal service.

*Conferences.* The number of conferences held during the study period was 219. Most of these were for the purpose of planning or discussing some part of the health department program. Thirty-five conferences were held with physicians; twenty-two of these were in regard to clinics or the control of communicable disease, and the remainder were for the purpose of arranging medical care. Fourteen of the eighteen practicing physicians residing within the county were represented among the ad-

Table 9. Number of conferences held by health officer during study period.

PERSONS OR GROUPS	NUMBER	PERSONS OR GROUPS	NUMBER
Physicians	35	Community leaders	8
County superintendents of the poor	32	Members of health department staff	10
Members of state health department	29	U. S. Public Health Service representatives	14
County boards of supervisors	16	Others	24
County superintendents of schools	12		
Other county officials	17		
Town officials	13		
Teachers	9	TOTAL	219

	Hours	
	Number	Per cent
Service to individuals	472.0	31.4
Immunization service	223.4	14.9
Control of communicable disease	143.4	9.5
Arranging for or investigating the need of medical or material relief	76.1	5.1
Miscellaneous services	29.1	1.9
Staff supervision and conferences with members of staff or of State health department	182.5	12.2
Conferences with officials, teachers, doctors, community leaders, and others	124.1	8.3
Supervision of health department clinics	115.4	7.7
Administrative duties other than conferences, clinics, or staff supervision	608.0	40.5
Reports and correspondence	260.5	17.3
Attending meetings	10.5	0.7
Reading and study of journals and scientific publications	30.0	2.0
Other and unclassified	307.0	20.4
TOTAL	1,502.0	100.0

Table 10. Distribution of health officer's time on duty over a period of ten months.

ministrative contacts. The interests represented by the individuals with whom the health officer conferred and the number of conferences are presented in Table 9.

According to the purpose stated on the record, 43 per cent of the conferences were to plan or discuss health department service, 14 per cent were in regard to health department appropriations, and 22 per cent were held because of medical or material relief problems. The remainder were for miscellaneous purposes. About 45 per cent of the conferences took place in the health department office at Lawrenceville; 52 per cent were held on the premises or in the offices of those seen; and the remaining 3 per cent were held in other places.

*Time Analysis.* Counting Saturdays as half days, the health officer was on duty 225 of the 231.5 work days contained in the ten-month period of the study. His records accounted for a total of approximately 1,502 hours on duty, which was an average of 6 hours and 40 minutes per day, thus approximating a work day of 7 hours. The time spent on duty was the customary amount for that locality. Nearly 58 per cent of the time was spent on duties connected with the health department offices, 20 per cent was consumed by automobile travel, about 8 per cent was spent in schools, 4 per cent in the homes of patients or other persons, and 10 per cent was spent in other places in the field.

DOROTHY G. WIEHL