
PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS called the *Public Health Service Act* "a milestone in the 146-year history of the United States Public Health Service." We reprint the description of

the Act that appeared in the July 14, 1944, issue when *PHR* was published weekly through the Division of Public Health Methods in the Office of the Surgeon General.

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PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE ACT, 1944

The Public Health Service Act, signed by President Roosevelt on July 3, 1944, is another milestone in the 146-year history of the United States Public Health Service.

The Act brings together in compact and orderly arrangement substantially all existing law affecting the Service. It eliminates many outmoded regulations and, in a series of revisions dictated by operating experience, streamlines the administration of the Public Health Service.

In several respects the Act broadens the scope of previously established Public Health Service functions. It provides authority to make grants-in-aid to research institutions for study of any disease—in the same way the National Cancer Act of 1937 provides for cancer research. It authorizes expansion of the Federal-State cooperative public health programs, and calls for the establishment of a national tuberculosis control program, patterned after the venereal disease control program.

The final act presented to the President for approval is the result of two years' work and study under the leadership of Representative Alfred L. Bulwinkle, of North Carolina. It is due to the interest and close attention of Mr. Bulwinkle, Senator Elbert Thomas, of Utah, and their colleagues that this essential streamlining of the Nation's public health law has been brought to a successful conclusion.

The new law retains all the important duties which Congress has laid upon the Service in previous legislation enacted over the last half century. Basic responsibilities still include medical and hospital care of American Merchant Marine seamen, the United States Coast Guard, and other Federal beneficiaries; the National Quarantine Service; scientific research; control of biologic products; and care of lepers and narcotic drug addicts. Assistance to State and Territorial health departments also will continue.

In recent years, the trend of public health work has been toward tackling public health problems individually and directing all available resources to the eradication of widely prevalent diseases which place an unnecessary burden upon the health and economy of the Nation. The new law, which authorizes establishment of a tuberculosis control program, makes it possible to extend this type of direct attack. The program follows the pattern of the national venereal disease control program, authorized by the Congress in 1938. It places upon the Public Health Service the responsibility of administering grants-in-aid to State health departments, and of conducting demonstrations and research leading toward the eradication of tuberculosis.

The Act also raises the ceiling of Federal appropriations for grants-in-aid to the States for general public health services from \$11,000,000 annually (as provided under title VI of the Social Security Act) to \$20,000,000. It empowers the Service to use a limited portion of these funds for the training of public health personnel and for special demonstrations in the solution of particular community health problems.

Provision also is made for the strengthening of the commissioned corps of the United States Public Health Service and for the commissioning of specialists in scientific fields relating to public health—such as entomology, chemistry, and zoology. Under the new law, nurses may now be commissioned in the Service. Other sections of the Act carry over previous legislation giving the commissioned personnel of the Public Health Service in wartime substantially the same benefits and privileges afforded officers of the Army and Navy.

Fundamental reorganization laws expanding Public Health Service functions and strengthening its administration have been enacted through the years. Acts of Congress in 1878, 1890, 1893, and 1906 authorized the Service to prevent the introduction of epidemic diseases into this country from abroad and to prevent the interstate spread of communicable diseases. In 1889, the Service was organized along military lines and provision made for the establishment of a corps of commissioned officers with grades, ranks, and rates of pay similar to those of the Army and Navy Medical Corps.

The organization of the Service now includes four major administrative units—the Office of the Surgeon General, the National Institute of Health, the Bureau of State Services, and the Bureau of Medical Services. The staff of the Surgeon General is made up of a Deputy Surgeon General and three Assistant Surgeons General in charge of the three bureaus. In addition, staff officers with the rank of Assistant Surgeon General are assigned to the administration of dental and sanitary engineering activities. The Medical Director of the United States Coast Guard has the rank of Assistant Surgeon General on the staff of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service.

The significance of the Public Health Service Act is far reaching. From a legislative point of view, the codification of laws of a Service which came into being in 1798 is of direct benefit, not only to the Service itself, but to the various governmental and State agencies that have to deal with public health. It might well serve as model legislation for all Federal services and bureaus.