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The Parochial School Health Committee of The Catholic Physicians' Guild of New Orleans Its Formation and Activities*

URING the middle of the year 1951, through the cooperation and guidance of Msgr. Henry C. Bezou, the Archdiocesean Superintendent of Schools of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, a group of Catholic physicians decided to undertake a Health Program for the Catholic Schools of the greater New Orleans area. The need for such a program seemed obvious. A special survey of the Public School health conditions had been made in 1949, and it is possible that the results of this survey provided an impetus, through the Archdiocesean Superintendent, for the initiation of this effort. The first meeting was held on June 14, 1951. This and all subsequent meetings of the group have been held in the office of the Superintendent. The objects of the program were stated as follows:

- To promote a program of physical examinations of all parochial school children:
- To encourage parents to bring their children to their family physicians for this examination:
- To furnish this service for those children whose parents were

*This report was prepared by Drs. James T. Nix, Nick J. Accardo, and W. H. Harris, Jr., who have served terms as chairman of the Parochial School Health Committee. unable to afford private med cal care;

- To standardize measures for emergency medical care;
- To educate the child, his family and teacher in health atters.

The initial group consister of approximately ten physic ins. From this beginning, the group has grown to one of some eighty hysicians who participate in the program in one capacity or ano her. The Chairman of the Health Committee of the Catholic Schools Cooperative Clubs also attends the meetings of the group. The peetings are held approximately four times during the year. These meetings are largely for the purpose of formulating plans and policies and giving direction to the activities of the group. At the present time, the group has come to be known as the Parochial School Health Committee and is now a Committee of the Catholic Physicians' Guild (since 1953). Most of the participating physicians are members of the Catholic Physicians' Guild but there is an appreciable number of non-Catholic physicians who have also taken part in this program. Member physicians are assigned one or more schools, preferably in the environs of their

home or office. These physicians are responsible for the health program in these schools. In order to maintain continuity and to accomplish good school-physician relationship, the assignments are not rotated.

Activities

The present activities of the Parochial School Health Committee consist of the following:

1). Physical examinations. Physical examinations are provided for children in the Parochial and some of the private Catholic schools in [Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard (Civil) | Parishes in the area of greater New Orleans. This comprises a group of sixtynine schools. Until this year, in all but one school, only children in the first grade have been examined. The total school population for elementary schools in this area in the parochial and private schools is approximately 38,000. It is therefore estimated that approximately four to five thousand children are in the first grade in this group. From the beginning, the committee has emphasized that these children should be examined by their private physicians. The function of the committee in this activity has been to examine those children who are not taken care of by their private physicians. The examinations are recorded on the Louisiana State Department of Health Student Health Record forms, provided by the Health Department. The health records are kept on file in each school. In 1954-55, 2,597 children were examined in this program. Previous years showed a somewhat higher

number of children examined. It is obvious that not 50% of the children in these schools are from families unable to provide for this examination by their private physicians. However, the Committee has taken the attitude that it is better to examine the children, after the parents have been urged but have failed to have the examination done by a private physician, rather than let the children go unexamined at all. Actually, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of children examined each year, although the number of schools covered has increased; thus, parents are being gradually educated to the idea of a routine physical examination for their children.

The leading defects which have been found from year to year are: dental caries, enlarged tonsils, orthopedic defects, especially poor posture, intestinal parasites, and skin rashes. At the time of the examination, also, the immunization record of each child is reviewed and it has been consistently noted that a fairly large number of the children lack proper immunizations (perhaps 3 to 4%).

2). Visual Program. From the beginning, there has been an Opthalmologist in the Committee. The visual program has taken the form of a routine eye examination, using the Massachusetts test. Each school has been urged to procure the inexpensive equipment needed for this test. The Opthalmologist has made talks to parent groups and has made available office time to representatives from the schools in order to instruct people in each

school in the use of the equipment for he test. The test is then conducted by these people in their respective schools. Many of the schools have taken advantage of this opportunity, though the response here has been less than it should be.

3). Hearing Program. The hearing program was started two years ago. At this time, two Otolaryngologists became interested in the work of the Committee and offered to conduct the hearing program. Through their efforts and with the aid of audiometers purchased by the Catholic Schools Cooperative Clubs, the hearing tests have been conducted on a large number of the children not only in the first grade but in the other grades of the schools of this area. Teams of lay-ladies, from the various Mothers' Clubs, instructed in the use of these machines, conduct the initial screening examinations. Those children who do not pass the screening test are then brought to the Otolaryngologist for a more detailed test in a sound-proof room. Some 3,500 children are given the screening test each year. In 1954, 200 of these did not pass the screening test. Of these 200, about 100 came in for the recheck and of these, 50 showed definite defects. Of these 50 children, only 11 were cases in which the parents were actually aware of the hearing problem of their children. This month, through a generous donation, the Archdiocesan School System has acquired a bus in which a sound-proof booth for audio testing will be installed. This will be known as the Healthmobile.

- 4). Laboratory Examination
 A stool and urine examination
 provided by the State Health Dipartment Laboratories for all fir grade children. The Chairman if
 the Health Committee of the Catlolic Schools Cooperative Clubs a ranges the schedule for the schools
 with the Health Department if
 the submission of these specime is
 for examination. These examinations have been valuable, with the
 finding of parasites in two to the
 percent of the children in various years.
- 5). Dental Program. From e beginning, it became obvious that dental caries was the most comn in defect which was found in the se children. In 1954, a dentist joi ed the Committee and through his fforts the Dental Society of his area undertook to conduct a "d ntal health day" for the Paroc al schools. This is to be an annual activity. Last year some 40 or 50 dentists cooperated in carrying out this work. It was reported that perhaps as high as 85 to 90% of the children examined by the dentists showed need for dental care. A major problem, of course, is low to provide the needed dental care in such a large group. Efforts will be made in this direction in the future.
- 6). Other activities. Among the members of the Committee is a Neuropsychiatrist. He has given a talk to the principals of the schools in this area, stressing some of the possible problems in children in this field. He has offered to cooperate with the various schools in working out any problems which are brought to his attention.

The Committee has also functioned in an advisory capacity at times for the Archdiocesean Superintendent of Schools. Fluoridation of water supply, for example, has met with considerable discussion in this area. The Superintendent was interested in obtaining the views of the Parochial School Health Committee in this matter. Of course, it seemed to the Committee that such a step would be highly beneficial, particularly in view of the high rate of dental caries in these children.

The Committee functioned in a somewhat emergency capacity during the past year, when the Salk Poliomyelitis vaccine became available to the school children of the first and second grades. The Archdiocesean Superintendent turned naturally to the Parochial School Health Committee for the administration of this vaccine to the Catholic school children, since the Health Department did not have sufficient personnel to cover our schools. During this time, some 7,500 to 8,000 children were given their first dose of the vaccine through the efforts of this

Committee. Approximately, half this number of children returned for the second dose, and about 2,700 for the third dose.

The entire health program uses community services, volunteer personnel, and is conducted without cost to the Archdiocese.

Summary and Conclusion

The Parochial School Health Committee of the Catholic Physicians' Guild of New Orleans provides an important service in the field of routine physical examinations, visual and hearing programs and routine dental examinations. It is available in an advisory capacity in health matters to the Archdiocesean Superintendent of Schools. Each year the program of the Committee has tended to expand somewhat. It is earnestly hoped that better health in the Parochial school children, the real aim of this Committee, is being steadily accomplished.

It is hoped also that this report may be stimulus to other Catholic Physicians' Guilds to organize similar projects for Catholic schools in their area.

