

See correspondence dated November 29, 1955 from Dr. Morris Fishbein regarding this article, "PROGRESS TOWARD INDUSTRIAL HEALTH IN 1955", filed under Fishbein (in General Correspondence).

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PROGRESS TOWARD INDUSTRIAL HEALTH IN 1955

The investigation of the potential and actual hazards to the health and well-being of the people who perform the work in industrial organizations continues to be the foundation on which the structure of modern industrial medicine is being built. The increasing volume of published reports of such investigations conducted in laboratories and medical groups within industry, in governmental agencies, in universities and in private research organizations testifies to the growth of the armamentarium of preventive medicine in industry. In view of the great bulk of the incomplete and unpublished work of this type, and especially because of obstacles of many kinds that delay and sometimes prevent the publication of clinical, epidemiologic and toxicologic information, the appraisal of the progress made within any calendar year is almost impossible. Certainly this cannot be done in a realistic manner by singling out a few of the contributions to the year's crop of scientific publications. The published material is the principal tangible product, but in a relatively new field of scientific endeavor, the increase in the quantity and in the general quality of the product is more likely to be a valid index of progress than is the individual contribution or discovery, unless the latter is of such epoch-making character as to require no unusual wisdom for its recognition. What is more to the point of these remarks, progress in a developing field of professional practice may be represented most significantly by the ripening

of a concept within the primary and ancillary groups involved in the general discipline, whereby growing knowledge flows steadily and vigorously through the avenues of professional education into the community or segment of the community that has been prepared to give it application.

The type of progress envisaged above is the outstanding characteristic of the year 1955 in the field of industrial health. It has not come about within this one year, nor is it, in any sense, complete. Certain activities of recent years have taken definite form within the year, however, providing conventional landmarks which may not be disregarded or taken lightly. Of these the most symbolic is the affiliation of Occupational Medicine with Aviation Medicine and Public Health within the American Board of Preventive Medicine, which was approved at the last meeting of the American Medical Association in Atlantic City in June. The significance of this affiliation lies not so much in the immediate event as in the manner of its accomplishment, the validity of the claim made by industrial physicians that occupational medicine is a specialized field of medical knowledge and practice, and the promise which the accomplished fact holds for the future of the specialty.

Behind the recognition of the specialty by the Council on Medical Education and Hospitals of the American Medical Association, and by the Advisory Board for the Medical Specialties, lies the development of a sound core of professional training in a number of schools in this country and abroad, by means of which, more than by any other criteria, the nature and scope of occupational medicine (commonly spoken of as industrial medicine in its limited application to industry, as differentiated from its general concern

with the impact of man's occupation upon his health) came to be defined. Back of this training, too, lay the still growing awareness of industrial physicians and medical educators that the hygienic needs of our industrial society demand, for their satisfaction, the application of a new brand of preventive medicine; that, without abandoning the disciplines and techniques of preventive medicine which have served the community well in the era characterized largely by microbotic threats to human health, there is urgent need to cultivate the new methods of a preventive medicine that will bring under control the hazards to health created by man's applications of the physical sciences to his daily life. The palliative character of industrial medicine, in its earlier preoccupation with the treatment of the end results of human exposure to dangerous environmental conditions, and with its emphasis on disability and workmen's compensation, is giving way rapidly to the viewpoints and techniques of industrial hygiene, environmental appraisal and control, and rehabilitation. The ultimate social and economic consequences of this change in viewpoint and strategy can only be imagined, but they begin to be apparent.

The effects of the new orientation of industrial medicine, now potentiated by formal professional sanction, may be expected to find their way into general medical practice, by virtue of the growing demands made upon physicians generally to spend some part of their time in industrial practice, especially in small industries. Approximately half of the American work force is employed

in such industries, and the almost utter lack of preventive medicine within these thousands of establishments is an outstanding problem of industrial and community health. American medicine has shown great capacity for responding to clear calls to duty, and it is to be expected that the new knowledge of preventive medicine in industry will find expression and application through appropriate emphasis on this aspect of the training and practice of physicians. A hopeful sign of progress in this direction has been manifest in the consideration given to this subject in recent months in conferences of practicing physicians and medical educators.

The recognition and the definition of occupational medicine as a specialized field of medical research, training and practice has even wider potential consequences, however, than those suggested above. It has been apparent, recently, that modern industrial production and distribution have altered not only the environment in which the work of the world is done but also the physical basis of modern life. The hazards of industry show themselves on streets and highways, and find their way into man's food and water supplies and into the air he breathes, in the form of chemical contaminants; they invade the household as the machinery of comfort and convenience, and as chemicals that find a wide range of usage. The evidence for the reality of these hazards is seen in the high incidence of fatal and disabling accidents, especially on the highways and in the home. In the latter connection, a new mechanism for the distribution of pertinent information in emergency has come into existence, as a

sign of the times and also as a significant note of progress, in that "poison centers" have been and are being set up in a number of cities. These are in readiness to convey to physicians the available information for the prompt handling of cases of accidental poisoning now so common, especially among small children.