August 1956

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

Catholic Physicians' Guilds

Follow this and additional works at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol23/iss3/1
The Parochial School Health Committee of
The Catholic Physicians' Guild of New Orleans
Its Formation and Activities*

During the middle of the year 1951, through the cooperation and guidance of Msgr. Henry C. Bezou, the Archdiocesan 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 Archdiocesan 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:

1. To promote a program of physical examinations of all parochial school children;
2. To encourage parents to bring their children to their family physicians for this examination;
3. To furnish this service for those children whose parents were unable to afford private medical care;
4. To standardize measures for emergency medical care;
5. To educate the child, his family and teacher in health matters.

The initial group consisted of approximately ten physicians. From this beginning, the group has grown to one of some eighty physicians who participate in the program in one capacity or another. The Chairman of the Health Committee of the Catholic Schools Cooperative Clubs also attends the meetings of the group. The meetings are held once a month. 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 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 relationships, 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 six- nine 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 Ophthalmologist 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 Ophthalmologist has made talks to parent groups and has made available office time to representatives from the schools in order to instruct people in each
3). Hearing Program. The hearing program was started two years ago. At this time, two Otologistes 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 from the first grade to the other grades of the schools in this area. Teams of lay-ladies, from the various Mothers’ Clubs, were instructed in the use of these machines, conducted the initial screening examinations. Those children who do not pass the screening test are then brought to the Otologist for a more detailed test in a sound-proof room. Some 350 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 check-up 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 to conduct a hearing test and an installation will be installed. This will be known as the Healthmobile.

4). Laboratory Examination. A stool and urine examination is provided by the State Health Department Laboratory for all first grade children. The Committee members of the Archdiocesan School Cooperative Clubs arrange the schedule for the schools with the Health Department for the submission of these specimens. These examinations have been valuable, with the finding of parasites in two to ten percent of the children in various years.

5). Dental Program. From the beginning it became obvious that dental care was the most common defect which was found in these children. In 1954, a dentist joined the Committee and through his efforts the Dental Society of this area undertook to conduct a “dental health day” for the Archdiocesan 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 percent of the children examined by the dentists showed need for dental care. A major problem, of course, is how 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.