PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING AMONG THE INDIANS.*

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Public Health Nursing in the Indian Service is a challenging and stimulating opportunity to render service to an interesting race.

There are approximately 350,000 Indians belonging to 230 tribes, who are scattered throughout 26 States and live on 200 reservations. With the exception of New York, Florida, North Carolina, Mississippi, Michigan, and Wisconsin, all these States lie west of the Mississippi River.

Most of the Indians live on reservations, which vary in size and in distance from the railroads. Each reservation has a community centre, which is the agency or the reservation headquarters. Here are found the general administrative offices, hospitals, and boarding schools, as well as the headquarters of the extension, land, C.C.C.–I.D., forestry and grazing, irrigation, and roads divisions. The Government has a garage to care for all the Government cars. There are stores, churches and homes to house the fairly large personnel at the agency.

A certain proportion of public health nurses live at the agency and the others are stationed at sub-agencies or in small communities, which lie from 30 to 100 miles (sometimes farther) from the base or hospital. At a sub-agency, there is usually a school with from one to four teachers, and often a farm agent and other personnel. The public health nurse away from the agency lives usually in a house, which consists of a living-room, bedroom, kitchen and bath, and one room furnished as a dispensary and office. These cottages are equipped with modern plumbing and with electric lights, electric stoves, and electric refrigerators where electricity is available. Where it is not available, ice boxes and gas stoves with independent units of artificial gas are installed. The homes are comfortably furnished.

Teaching by Demonstration.

Public health nursing in the Indian Service is comparable to a rural public health nursing service which has a generalised programme, although the emphasis may be somewhat different. In home visits, teaching is done through demonstration. Patients are impressed by good technique. They understand and learn more readily through seeing and hearing than through verbal instructions only.

In school nursing, emphasis is placed on correlating the health teaching with the classroom work and helping the teacher find reference material. A physician gives annual examinations and the nurse assists. In trachomatous areas, the nurse gives oil treatments, usually twice a week, and an attendant is taught to instil drops in the eyes on other days. Generalised clinics are conducted by a physician, and the nurse assists and makes the necessary follow-up visits. Classes are taught in schools and in community centres to students in junior and senior high schools and to adults.

It should be remembered that in the Indian Service the same underlying principles in public health nursing apply as in any other service. It is essential that the nursing programme be based upon the needs of the community that is being served. It is difficult in the Indian Service—as in all large isolated rural services—to adhere to an educational programme where transportation is a difficult problem, where distances are great, where cars and railroads are scarce, where other duties are thrust upon the nurse, and where the economic level is low. However, many of these obstacles can be met through the resourcefulness of the nurse and through friendly but persistent teaching.

In the Indian Service—as in all public health nursing—it is important to give good professional service, to use good technique, to give correct information, and to use simple, understandable terminology. The Indian is quick to detect a break in technique and to observe a nurse's inability to meet a situation. He has a keen sense of humour, but will tolerate no ridicule at his own expense.

In describing the Indian Nursing Service, one almost has to designate the section of the United States he is describing. In Minnesota, for example, the Chippewas are intermarried with the French-Canadians. They live in a way similar to that of the white man, on the same economic level. They dress the same way, eat the same kind of food, and live in the same kind of houses as white people. There are very few full bloods in this area. In the Dakotas, the Sioux are also intermarried and live in the same way as their white neighbours. There are more full bloods in this area, and the older men and women wear their hair in long braids and often wear blankets, which is an Indian custom. They usually live in small houses, although a few live in tents. In Oklahoma and Kansas is found a highly educated Indian. Most of the Indians in these States are intermarried and very few full bloods are found. The late Will Rogers and former United States Vice-President Curtis were of Indian blood and came from this area. Recently, the vice-president of the University of Oklahoma stated that 11 per cent. of the 7,000 students enrolled at the University of Oklahoma were of Indian extraction.

Living Conditions and Customs.

In the South-west and in Florida most of the full-blood Indians are found. They are the most colourful although the most primitive Indians. On the Navajo Reservation there are approximately 45,000 full-blood Indians, most of whom cannot speak English. They live in small round mud igloos, called hogans. There are no windows and the door always faces the east. As one stoops to go through the door, he is at first blinded upon coming from the very bright sunshine of the desert into the dark, smoky room. In the centre of the floor is an open fire. There is a large hole in the roof through which the smoke escapes. As one's eyes accommodate to the darkness and smoke, one usually discovers a group of Indians sitting with their legs crossed on the ground floor, around the fire, spitting into the fire. Many are rubbing their trachomatous eyes with the backs of their hands, and often they are playing with little children. Possibly leaning against the wall of the hogan is a bright-eyed baby strapped to a cradle-board, who watches one intently and is contented unless one comes too near. Occasionally one sees a loom where a beautiful Navajo rug is being woven, although these are usually found outside of the hogan.

The Indians love pretty colours, which is evident in the Navajo dress. Women have very wide skirts made of two flounces of different coloured material sewed together with contrasting coloured tape. Their blouses are of velvet, usually brown or taupe. The buttons are silver coins, usually dimes, although quarters are sometimes used. Both the men and the women have long hair, which is twisted into a peculiar pug at the back and is tied with bright coloured cloth or yarn. They wear brown moccasins, which snap in the back with silver studs. The men wear bright coloured shirts, either of velvet or silk, in red, orange, yellow, or purple colours. They also wear "ten-gallon hats." Both men and women wear a great deal of jewellery. The Navajo makes his living through sheep-raising and silversmithing. It is not uncommon for a trader to hold a single bracelet valued at 20 dollars, for which

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