

32  
February 7, 1944.

Dear Dr. Sawyer:

The time has come when the Foundation's program in typhus control should be reconsidered and definite policies established.

When the invitation was received last September from AMG to get ready to do typhus control in Naples under the auspices and in the uniform of the ARC, I realized in part the difficulties which might be encountered. Some of these could have been avoided had approval for action been given immediately but there were others which could not be foreseen without much more information than was then available to us.

We started to work with powder on December 15 with first class personnel and some transportation but found it impossible to expand as rapidly as we wished because of a shortage of both these items from our one source of supply. In addition, there was not in sight at that time an amount of insecticide which permitted the organization of a real mass delousing project. These three items, personnel, transportation and insecticide are the three bottle necks which must be faced in the future.

Subordinate personnel for actual dusting operations can of course be easily trained locally but Davis and I have proved to our own satisfaction that two on a team is not enough where these two face an emergency situation in which all details have to be handled individually. There is now a group of Italian doctors all of whom know the way we work but there would undoubtedly be considerable difficulty in transporting personnel from one country to another in wartime if we should be called upon to work in other countries later. On the other hand there are three young Americans who were in Italy getting their medical degrees when war overtook them who are well trained reliable men who might well be considered as second string men for international work.

Transportation and insecticide can be dismissed with a word; both are available only through official sources or with the approval of official sources.

The bottle necks here were cleared only after typhus began to show an alarming rate of increase and after General Fox appeared on the scene. Although the United States of America Typhus Commission took over the direct responsibility for the program only on the 3rd of January its influence on the situation made itself felt during the preceding week.

Since January 3rd, the Foundation group has been responsible only for the Mass Delousing Section but has followed with a great deal of interest the work of the other sections. It may interest you to know that the other sections have been 1) Case Finding, 2) Contact Delousing, 3) Immunization, 4) Out-of-Town (Case Finding and Contact Delousing) and 5) Refugee Sections. You will also be interested to know that the administration of the different sections is in the hands of USATC, AMG and RF directors. The spirit of cooperation between the different sections has been excellent.

February 7th 1944.

2.

I have referred to bottle necks and difficulties above; but on the other side of the ledger is the recent demonstration here that a rapidly rising epidemic curve can be checked at the beginning of the usual epidemic season more rapidly than was anticipated. After the season is over we should be able to say something about the duration of the smouldering foci.

As I look back on the field work of last year it seems to me that the two outstanding points are the demonstration that clothing can be successfully powdered without removing it from its wearer and the discovery that large percentages of the entire population of a district will come to Delousing Stations for dusting. It really came as a surprise to some of us to learn that Egyptians, Arabs and Neapolitans do not like being lousy and will make an effort to get rid of their parasites if given the opportunity to do so. Of course the urge is greater when typhus is threatening but the parasites themselves seem to be sufficient reason for many people to go out of their way to get powdered. (One of our serious problems here has been to prevent the theft of the powder to meet the demand of the black market where it rated a high quotation.)

And so with an easy and rapid method of blocking epidemic typhus not only available but proven in the field, the question naturally must be faced of how best to coordinate the efforts of the agencies which are interested in this field of activity.

(acc)  
The AMG authorities expect to assume the responsibility for typhus control in this area again in the near future. Lt. Col. W.C. Williams, previously state director of health for Tennessee, is to be the overall director of the project. Col. Williams has requested that the Foundation group continue its activities here.

I have discussed the larger aspects of the problem of typhus control with General Fox and am writing this letter to bring to your attention some of the points raised. It seems that the USATC has been given the responsibility of typhus control in active military theaters but will expect to turn over this responsibility to civilian agencies as soon as possible. Under these circumstances it is a matter of concern to the USATC to know what preparations are being made by other available agencies to assume this responsibility. General Fox has also called attention to the possibility of important typhus problems in regions where the USATC might not conveniently operate. He has raised the question as to how far the RF is willing to go in getting ready to operate on as large a scale as may be necessary. This of course forces the issue of a general working agreement with AMG, UNRA, the War Department and possibly the Red Cross.

I am enclosing herewith a copy of a memorandum of Feb. 5 to Col. Bishop which covers some points not mentioned herein.

I shall talk further with Col. Williams before making recommendations for additional personnel in this field since arrangements must be made for their transportation thither.

Sincerely yours,

Fred L. Soper.