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On Thursday, March 14, 1985, I visited the Todd County Health Department to observe the activities there from 1 P.M. through 4P.M. All of Todd County, which now has a population of approximately 11,000, is serviced by this department located in Elkton. It is a part of a District Health System which also includes the counties of Christian, Hopkins, and Muhlenberg. I will first explain who the people at the department are, then go through the services provided. Last I will explain how the academic medicine here blends with the folk medicine of the community. At this department I found two systems, at a minimum, blending to produce a mix which is both effective and practical to the greatest extent possible considering all the obligations the staff has, both legally and morally.

The Todd County Health Department provides a great number of services. There are ten major actors there to provide the various services. There are two R.N.'s. Delene is one; she is the **Nurse Coordinator**. She says this means she coordinates Norma. Norma is the other R.N. Her title is **Community Health Nurse**. The **Nurse Coordinator** title has more meaning in larger departments regarding responsibilities, yet is retained here for the very practical reason that salary commensurate goes with the position. Libby is the **Administrative Assistant**. This is another position which is titled thus more for the salary it gives the employee than for the duties it entails. It is Libby's job to coordinate all activities with the other three departments. Candy is the **Clerk-typist**. Sharon is a psychologist; she comes in one day a week from the Mental Health Center in Christian

County to do mental health counseling. Another day each week another community health worker comes in as Family Planning Outreach worker; this person performs the same function in 3 of the 4 departments in this district. Donna comes in usually twice a month from Rehabilitation Services; her duties will be described a little further on. Joyce is an ARNP; an Accredited Registered Nurse Practitioner. She is qualified to do family planning exams and prescribe birth control. Keith is the Environmentalist; his main duty is to do on site inspection of all plumbing work done in the county. Mike is an Inspector; his job is to inspect restaurants, groceries, school lunchrooms and to follow up on any reports of contaminated foods.

The department staff performs a number of services for the residents of Todd County. The entire staff feels their family planning services to be the greatest service they have to offer. At the department an exam can be conducted, counseling on infertility and natural family planning can be done, birth control can be dispensed, some minor infections can be treated, pregnancy tests done and referrals made in the case of problems beyond the means of the department to handle. If a pregnancy test should prove positive, a prospective mother can be introduced to another important program, WIC.

WIC stands for Women, Infants and Children. This is a federal program designed to provide supplemental nutrition to low-income mothers and young children. After a few vital statistics are taken: blood pressure, height, weight and iron count; then one of the R.N.'s will conduct an interview.

and fill out nutritional information forms from which they can make a determination about the adequacy of the expectant mother's diet. If the mother-to-be is found to have dietary deficiencies this program can be utilized to provide her with papers redeemable at certain local grocery stores for milk, cheese, eggs, cereals, dried beans or peas, and fruit juices. A pregnant woman will be carried on the program throughout the pregnancy and for six weeks post-partum as long as it is determined she has the need. A re-evaluation is done at six month intervals. The coupons are dispensed monthly at the department. If a new mother breast feeds her infant she can be carried on the program until the child's first birthday. When the infant is born, he or she is also put on the program. Infants are provided with infant cereals, infant juices and non-breast fed babies are provided with some formula. After 1 year until the fifth birthday a young child with demonstrated need will be provided with the supplements in the same way as the expectant mothers.

Another service offered is EPSDT, or Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment. All mothers of children collecting AFDC are provided periodically with notice this service is available to them. This program provides for an initial evaluation physical and periodic rechecks for children with medical cards ages 0-21. An exam is done by one of the R.N.'s. She gives a physical assessment and makes referrals for any treatments or further evaluations which are deemed necessary.

Many other services are provided on request by the nurses. They do blood pressure checks, hematocrits, urine stick tests for protein and sugar; immunizations for DPT, polio, and MMR;

as well as flu shots in season. TB skin tests and readings are provided. PKU testing on newborns can also be requested. Diabetes screening with counsel on diet also can be provided.

The department handles vital statistics. Birth and death certificates are issued through the department. Libby doubles as the Registrar. Candy and Delene double as Deputy Registrars.

Donna from Rehab usually comes in twice a month. She is there to offer help to people with disabilities. The people she helps may have any of a number of disabilities such as, loss of hearing or vision, diabetes, or loss of limb. Donna helps coordinate the different programs available to these people which may be helpful in getting them back in to the work force.

Sharon provides mental health counseling and evaluations for anyone who asks for help.

The department handles Crippled Children's Program. This program helps children with orthopaedic problems, cleft palate, hearing or vision loss. This program is available to help, particularly, the families with low incomes to receive the special needs they might otherwise not be able to provide for their children.

It is important to note that all of the services performed here are either free or are offered on a sliding fee scale basis which means that for low-income people there is little or no cost.

The department also offers a Pediatric Clinic Program which deals with children with diabetes, epilepsy, asthma and other problems. If parents cannot afford help there are monies made available through various sources.

The department has a contract with the local school district to do pre-school exams each year. Part of the department staff comes in and sets up to assist two physicians with the physical exams. The R.N.'s also go into the schools to do scoliosis screening and make referrals. The department provides equipment for vision and hearing testing and teaches volunteers to use the equipment. Pre-school registration is done at the department in the spring also.

Head lice examination can be done with parental permission. Treatments used to be recommended, but now referrals are made to the family physicians for follow up of active cases.

Venereal disease screening and treatment is done also. All family planning patrons receive such checks. Checks are available to anyone requesting.

Referrals can be made where deemed helpful to the Home Health Program. Aides can be sent to homes to do blood pressure checks and baths. R.N.'s can be sent to homes to provide treatments, monitor O<sub>2</sub>, do dressings, catheters, and they provide home nursing type supplies.

A full record is kept on all immunizations. Special programs are offered when requested covering various aspects of health. Health care topics usually covered are of preventative types. A home ec teacher may request a presentation on birth control. A women's group may ask for a presentation on the importance of periodic breast examinations and pap smears.

Most of the people who come in for services hear about the department by word of mouth. Donna gets referrals from the

Department of Human Services and the Unemployment Office. People are referred for Sharon's services from Department of Human Services and from the nurses and sometimes from the school.

During the time I visited the department a number of people came in and called in. An elderly couple came in for a blood pressure check and used the scales to weigh themselves. They stopped a few minutes to chat about how the gentleman had weighed 17 pounds more just a couple of days ago at the doctor's office and that they thought the scales here were much better. A salesman came in and left some formula samples, some literature on formulas, and gave a pitch for a new formula developed by his company. A young woman came in with a small boy and an infant for a WIC evaluation. One call came in to request a death certificate. Another call came in from a man who had just been to the doctor. The physician's diagnosis of the man's problem was tendonitis. This man called in to then ask how long it would last and what he should do for swelling. He was advised to follow the doctor's orders. Another woman came in to have a TB test redone before going to Hopkinsville for a follow-up X-ray after a positive reaction to a previous test.

Delene and Norma, the R.N.'s, had many stories to tell about the people who come in and the requests they receive. There are many walk-in's and callers asking how to treat various skin problems, spots, rashes, and knots. Many callers ask for suggestions on how to treat injured or ill animals. Some call in to report mistreatment of animals. Many calls are asking for diagnosis. The R.N.'s are not allowed by law to do diagnosis.

Sometimes they get calls asking for cures for things like chicken pox. Many <sup>people</sup> come straight from the doctor's office to ask to have their blood pressure rechecked or their weight rechecked. These people often want to sit and chat about their diagnosis seemingly in the hopes for concurrence with either the doctor's diagnosis or sometimes with their own personal diagnosis if the person has their own idea of what is wrong if it is different from the 'official' diagnosis. The personnel of the department will patiently listen and advise that people follow their doctor's orders as that is the only course they have. Some come in with ideas about their own treatment. One gentleman comes in for an occasional blood pressure check and when told it is a little high he replies he will go home and eat a handful of salt for it. This gentleman also claims the nitroglycerine his doctor prescribes gives him chest pains. Another person sucks lemons for high blood pressure.

Many calls come in to report both abuse and neglect of elderly and children. These callers are referred to the Department of Human Services. The staff at the Health Department do try to assist in documenting these cases if possible.

There is a Mennonite group in the county. Members of this group do utilize some of the services the department has to offer. They come in for blood pressure checks. They bring in many of their infants for PKU tests, as many of the babies of the group are born at home or leave the hospital before an accurate test can be done. They don't request any contraceptives. When an outbreak of polio occurred in Pennsylvania some four or five years ago, the department received a phone call from that



state to find a girl who had been in contact with someone with an active case. The state representative wanted the department to find the girl, find out how many Mennonites in the community, and how well they were protected. The Mennonites cooperated fully with the department and helped them meet the deadline. They also allowed the R.N.'s to come in to their school to do immunizations. In general, the R.N.'s say, the Mennonites use a lot of herb treatments and use chiropractors more often than medical doctors.

Overall, the services of the department are of a preventative nature. The measures they provide are to diagnose health problems at an early stage and to refer to medical doctors for treatments before problems get too far along. They work to prevent diet problems which would lead to further medical problems. The work to prevent unwanted pregnancy is one of their most important preventative measures.

The department provides the community with a back-up system. It is a place people can go who want assurance and someone to take time to listen when the doctors don't take the time. They are there to do referrals and to tell people about services which can be had for little or no cost. They have a great network into which they can steer persons whose problems are beyond the scope of the facility to handle. They patiently check and recheck blood pressures and iron counts. They listen to people list symptoms, and talk about illness and operations and treatments. The department cannot do diagnosis in most cases, but can make referrals whenever they suspect a problem.

The department provides information about health matters to many people. For the Mennonites the <sup>dept.</sup> provides what services they can without trying to push those services which they are not interested in receiving. The R.N.'s do not talk of two or more systems of belief coming into contact with each other in the department, yet it is obvious to me that this is occurring and they are handling it with great patience and diplomacy. They seem to see themselves as go-betweens. They try to walk between the systems and use their knowledge of the systems to provide the most health care possible within those constraints which apply to any given case. The nurses themselves, and the other personnel to a lesser extent, are a connection between the systems.

The entire staff sees the communities' health to be at stake. It is their job. The nurses especially are able to adjust, to fit in, to help to whatever extent is possible or acceptable to the people who come to them.

One of my favorite examples of this blending occurred several months ago when I went in for my pregnancy test. After the test proved positive and I was processed for Wic coupons the nurse asked if I had heard about the pencil test. I said no and the nurse asked if I'd like to try it. We sat at a table with a needle on a string poked into the eraser end of a pencil and watched the pencil move back and forth across the pulse point on my wrist and round and round in turns going through the sex of each of my children. From this test comes the prediction that this baby will be a girl, and that I will someday have another boy as well. Time alone will tell. This type

of treatment gave me the best academic medicine had to offer, plus a touch of folk which made me feel closer to the people at the department and to feel they really cared and would give me time and attention and a friendly ear when needed. This gave me a definite feeling that I would go back again and again. I believe that many, if not all, leave with the same comfortable feeling and it is much different than the feelings most people have when leaving a physician's office.