

NEWS OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

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Germany

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

In the October-December 1963 issue of The Red Cross World, a review which is published by the League of Red Cross Societies, Dr. Werner Ludwig, President of the German Red Cross in the Democratic Republic of Germany, has written an interesting article on health education and the important rôle it plays in his own country. This question has become an essential one for certain National Societies and we think it to be of interest to reproduce the text of this article, which sums up the action which has been taken in this field by one of the Red Cross Societies.

The evolution of the Red Cross character, its main features and its programme throughout its one hundred years of existence are illustrated by its choice of a second motto "Per humanitatem ad pacem" (Through Humanity to Peace), to join the original "Inter arma caritas". In keeping with the humanitarian principles of promoting peace in the world the German Democratic Republic Red Cross has given priority to peacetime activities. It has strongly developed all activities whose aim is to protect the health of the population. These range from transportation of the sick, rescue, accident prevention and the establishment of more than twenty thousand first aid posts, to the support of the medical services during sporting and other mass events and many and varied forms of cooperation in industrial and rural accident prevention and health protection. They include also special services, such as the railway station service, and the water safety and mountain rescue services, which provide help and protection especially for those seeking sport and relaxation. Above

all the National Society concentrates on prophylactic work and emphasizes health education as an especially effective preventive measure.

In its aims health education must go beyond training in health habits and proficiency. Like general education, it forms personality; by imparting knowledge and awakening an awareness of health, behavioural change towards healthier living can be achieved. This "health consciousness" must be based on the firm conviction that progress in social development and medical knowledge provide the individual with opportunities of keeping fit and that, on the other hand, he owes it to society to watch over his health.

Such a long-term goal can only be reached through the common efforts of many and varied social groups and institutions. Recognition of this fact has led to the creation of a national "Committee for Health Living and Health Education", in which all the social and State organizations and institutions essential to health education work together in a coordinated way on organizational questions.

These elements are united in a similar way at the middle and lower administrative levels in "Health Education Units", which are linked to the Permanent Health and Social Commissions attached to the different elected people's bodies. This results in greater responsibility, increased efficiency and good coordination, without, however, limiting the individual initiative of the organizations concerned.

The National Society has been given important opportunities of joining in these efforts. On the basis of its previous experience it keeps closely to the following fundamental health education principles.

First of all, the conditions for health education have constantly to be analyzed in a scientific way. Based on the union and correlation between the organism and its environment, health education has to be adjusted to the specific internal and external demands of the group of people in question.

Above all, the fundamental difference between health education of adults and of children must be recognized. In many respects the adult has definite concepts, opinions and prejudices, which are often difficult to overcome; it is in childhood that the decisive foundation for future lines of conduct is laid. Differences between

the sexes, varying cultural and educational levels and the mentality of different professional categories also play their part.

It is essential too that health education advice and demands correspond to material conditions and opportunities of putting them into practice. Positive suggestions and illustrations should predominate in health education ; it should never consist only in forbidding certain lines of action.

Another important principle is that health education should be up to date. It has proved an advantage to link the points of emphasis to the health policy and, if necessary, seasonal considerations. This method of emphasizing the main features should be used systematically and continually. Scientific truthfulness, which is not the same as scientific completeness, is especially important. Only reliable knowledge, which can be clearly proved and is essential to an understanding of the subject, should be imparted. In the German Democratic Republic the necessary basis is established by scientific working groups, which have been formed in various fields of health education.

As for mass effectiveness, an essential factor in health education, it is the Red Cross which has decisively prepared the ground : it has trained its hundreds of thousands of members in healthy living, and they set the necessary individual and collective example. Large-scale health education campaigns mainly rely on the support of modern mass information media such as the press, radio, television and film ; small-scale actions, however, aim at achieving a permanent personal influence, from man to man. The people concerned should be encouraged to participate actively by an appeal to their feelings which will awaken their personal and material interest. Our Junior Red Cross, for example, plays an important role in the improvement, of school hygiene, especially by applying this methods of the personal influence of Red Cross members on the other pupils.

More and stronger emphasis, however, should be laid on health education in all spheres of activity of the adult Red Cross ; one of the ways of attaining this aim is the mass education of the population in first aid and home nursing.

The National Society's Health Units are a particularly effective element, as for years tens of thousands of the members, after

receiving specialized post-basic training, have been working very successfully as organised groups in industry and rural districts. The effectiveness of their health education work is increased by the fact that when making inspections and controls they not only criticize shortcomings, but take an active part in changes and make sure the improvements are checked. The educational effect of this practical work is a valuable supplement to suggestions and theoretical methods.

Thanks to this cooperation with the Public Health Services we have in the past years been able to contribute to the improvement of health conditions, a decline in infectious diseases and the general decrease of illnesses in the country.

Luxemburg

The Luxemburg Red Cross Annual Report for 1963 gives pride of place to child welfare. Courses have been started in infant nursing, dispensaries have been set up, a mobile unit for the care of babies has been brought into service, a nursery capable of accommodating 89 children has been organized, a foster-parents service is in operation and a children's home throughout the year has received 222 guests. We would also mention other functions, such as the running of holiday camps, the organization of vacations in the countryside, all of which corresponded to more than 57,000 hours in health resorts for some two thousand children. The school medical service in 116 villages is attended to by thirty itinerant nurses who in 1963 examined more than twenty thousand children of school age.

Mention must also be made of the blood transfusion service which carries on the various related activities, such as the recruitment of donors, the drawing of blood, the determination of blood groups.

The Red Cross is also concerned with a convalescent home and helps the blind, notably by looking after the financial side of the Luxembourg Association for the Blind. Yet a further activity