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Medico-Chi And The National Selective Service*

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PURPOSE

THIS account will describe a collaboration in the interest of the war effort between the Medico-Chirurgical Society of the District of Columbia and the National Selective Service in the conduct of physical examinations of selectees over the four year period from September 1940 through October 1944. This cooperation has a two-fold historical interest, first as a part of the vital service rendered nationally by the medical profession in the voluntary performance of the physical examinations essential to the conscription, and second, because the manner of incorporation of Negro professional personnel into the work was unique in the country as a whole and of a kind without precedent in relations between the Medical Society of the District of Columbia and the Medico-Chirurgical Society.† Now that the work has come to an end, the facts are reported while they are still not too difficultly available, in order that the nature and mode of development of this specific patriotic contribution of Negro physicians, made within the framework of the segregated social pattern, may become known to any who might have an interest in such facts.

FIRST STEPS

At the meeting of the American Medical Association in June 1940, the Surgeon General of the Army presented a plan for the cooperation of the medical profession under the draft act then anticipated. This plan was not accepted in its original form but a second plan devised jointly by representatives of the Army and the American Medical Association was subsequently approved by the medical organization. This was tantamount

to its acceptance for the medical profession generally.

Under this plan the country was divided into areas and each area was placed under the supervision of a civilian physician as chairman; Dr. Francis X. McGovern was named chairman for the District of Columbia. To assist Dr. McGovern in his work, the Medical Society of the District of Columbia appointed a Medical Resources Committee. This committee represented the District Medical Society in all arrangements for the approaching draft.

At the first meeting of his committee, Dr. McGovern affirmed that the Medico-Chirurgical Society should have representation in the set-up and early in September, he and Mr. Theodore Wiprud, Secretary of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, held informal conferences with Dr. Howard M. Payne, then president of Medico-Chi. From these conferences came the idea of the appointment of a Medical Resources Committee of the Medico-Chirurgical Society to handle the participation and interests of Negro physicians in the work of the Selective Service.

On September 14, 1940, Dr. Payne appointed a Medical Resources Committee composed of Drs. Phillip T. Johnson, William F. Nelson, Paul B. Cornely, statistician, T. Edward Jones, military consultant, Howard M. Payne, ex-officio, with the writer as chairman. The duties of this committee were originally conceived to be those involved in cooperation with the parallel committee of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia and with the Local Draft Boards in respect to professional responsibilities and any matters especially affecting Negro physicians in Washington, D. C.

On September 20, 1940, Dr. Payne notified Mr. Wiprud of the appointment and personnel of this committee, stating that it stood ready to cooperate fully with the parallel committee of the District Medical Society.

Since by October 4, no word had been received from either the Medical Society of the District

* Final report. Preliminary account, "The Selective Service and the Medico-Chirurgical Society, September 1940-July 1941," in *Bull. Med.-Chir. Soc. D.C.*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1941.

† For information on these relations see, "The First Negro Medical Society," by W. M. Cobb, Associated Publishers, Inc., Wash. D. C. 1939. x + 169 pp.

of Columbia or from the Selective Service requesting the cooperation of members of our Society in the preparations for the approaching draft examinations, and since the personnel of the Examining Boards nominated by the District Medical Society had been printed in the daily papers in several releases, the Medico-Chirurgical Committee addressed letters to Mr. Wiprud, Dr. McGovern, General Cox, Selective Service Executive of the District of Columbia, the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia and President Roosevelt, reaffirming the Society's patriotism and stating its preparedness to lend medical cooperation in respect to the draft and the fact that its services had not been requested up to that time.

The replies of the President of the United States and the D. C. Commissioners were routine referrals. General Cox expressed regret that he did not have the tender before him when the local boards were designated but stated that he was satisfied that "after registration is effective and the selection of the registrants is in process, you and your associates can be of great assistance. You may be sure that I shall keep your offer in mind." A telephone call, on October 9, was the first acknowledgement of our letter to Mr. Wiprud, who spoke also for Dr. McGovern. Mr. Wiprud stated that the matter of participation of our members on the Examining Boards had been favorably considered by both Dr. McGovern's Committee and General Cox's office and he requested the names of eight physicians for immediate assignment to draft boards.

Having anticipated such a request from some source, Medico-Chi's Committee had already compiled a list of its physicians who wished to volunteer their services for local examining boards if necessary.

Inasmuch as there had been no indication prior to the activity of this Committee that Negro physicians would be requested to serve on local examining boards, despite the afore-mentioned conferences between Dr. McGovern, Mr. Wiprud and Dr. Payne, the Committee believed that its representations were significantly responsible for securing this representation.

This implies no breach of faith on the part of the District Medical Society. At a meeting of the Committee on Military Affairs of that Society on

June 11, Dr. McGovern and Mr. Wiprud explained to Medico-Chi's chairman, who attended by invitation, that their preoccupation with the trial of the Government vs. the A.M.A. and Dist. Med. Soc. et al, had required the business of the Selective Service to be transacted under great pressure and disadvantage and that through unintentional error our men were not earlier appointed to examining boards.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT

Continuing the actual sequence of events, Mr. Wiprud, under date of October 24, wrote Dr. Cobb as follows:

"Our committee on Medical Resources has submitted the first four names of physicians which you gave me over the telephone to General Cox, recommending that they be appointed in the eleventh, twelfth, fifteenth, and nineteenth draft districts. The other physicians whose names you gave us will be recommended as alternates in the above districts.

"You can be sure that if there are any further developments in which your groups and ours should cooperate we will get in touch with you."

It will be observed that the physicians named by the Committee were assigned to different Draft Boards. As the Draft Boards were not constituted along racial lines and as registrants of both races were included in the lists of all draft boards, the "problem" of Negro physicians examining white registrants in the southern atmosphere of the Nation's Capital, might have presented itself at this point. An unrelated development, however, prevented this potentially "embarrassing" situation.

In those early days of pressure, the Army had to have large quotas of men quickly, and it was up to the Local Boards to process them with all possible speed. To expedite the physical examinations, Dr. McGovern's committee and Lt. Col. A. C. Gray, State Medical Officer for Selective Service in the District of Columbia, instituted an experimental plan whereby all examinations were performed at local hospitals by teams of physicians representing several Local Boards. This plan proved very successful and was afterward adopted with modifications in other places, notably New York and Chicago.

In Washington six examining teams operated at the following hospitals: Georgetown, Emergency, Garfield, Providence, Sibley and Freed-

men's. At each hospital registrants were examined from the same Local Boards as the physicians on the examining team represented. It came to be that Negro physicians were assigned only to Freedmen's Hospital and, except in a few cases of error, only Negro registrants were referred to this hospital for examination. Prevailing local custom was thus adhered to without apparently being a subject of consideration.

FREEDMEN'S EXAMINING BOARD

The Freedmen's Examining Board on July 2, 1941 consisted of 28 physicians and 5 dentists, a total of 33 professionals, representing 5 local Selective Service Boards, Nos. 11, 12, 15, 19 and 25. Dr. Jesse A. Keene served as Chief Examiner of the unit from November 15, 1940 through June 20, 1941, Dr. Montague Cobb, from June 20 through September 1, 1941, and Dr. William C. Goines, from September 1, 1941 until this phase of the work was completed at the end of January 1944.* The members of this Board were all appointed examining physicians by President Roosevelt on recommendation of the Medico-Chirurgical Society acting through its Committee on Military Affairs. These recommendations were routed through the Medical Society of the District of Columbia to the head of the District Selective Service who forwarded them to the President.

The professional staff was ably and faithfully supported by a team of lay volunteers, comprised regularly of 3 laboratory technicians, 3 typists and 9 clerical aides. In addition, miscellaneous valued assistance was received from medical students and

* The examining physicians and dentists of the Freedmen's Hospital Board as of July 2, 1941 were: Dr. W. M. Cobb, Chief Examiner, (Bd. 15); Drs. M. H. Curtis, I. B. Horn, G. F. Miller, W. F. Nelson, D. McC. Harper (Board No. 11); Drs. H. L. Ashley, C. P. Carmichael, W. C. Goines, C. R. Little, E. J. Watson, F. A. Turnef, (Board No. 12); Drs. R. K. Brown, U. B. Martin, J. O. Miles, T. R. Pinckney, (Board No. 15); Drs. H. C. Belden, L. R. Berry, A. R. Hughes, W. S. Savoy, O. N. Simmons, F. H. Trigg (Board No. 19); Drs. J. F. Dyer, U. L. Houston, W. E. Lewis, M. G. Lucas, H. Stevens, E. L. Williams (Board No. 25). Dentists: Drs. J. E. Bowman, N. H. Atkins, F. Barber, W. T. Randall, O. J. Williams. Orthopedic consultant: Dr. P. T. Johnson. Appointed later were Drs. E. E. Collins, J. R. Laurey, L. N. Archambeau and T. R. George.

from members of Local Board 12 and the local American Legion Post.

The examinations were held regularly two evenings a week and were so organized that the total staff of 46 could process a load of approximately 120 registrants in slightly more than two hours.

REGISTRANTS EXAMINED

From November 1940 through December 1941 all registrants were given a detailed physical examination in accordance with national directive. From January 1942 through January 1944 only a superficial screening examination to eliminate the obviously disqualified for military service, such as hopeless invalids, men with missing extremities and the insane, was given by the local Board examiners.*

During the first period of the detailed examination (13 months) approximately 7,000 selectees were processed by the Freedmen's unit. During the second period of the superficial examination (25 months) approximately 17,400 men passed through the Freedmen's board. This was equal to, if not the heaviest load examined by any of the hospital teams in the city.

The examinations of both series performed by the Freedmen's unit during its operation from November 1940 through January 1944 totaled approximately 34,400 men. In addition a large number of repeat serologicals, which sometimes ran as many as 150 a night, were done. The Selective Service authorities expressed full satisfaction with the work from beginning to end. This voluntary service by its members is one in which the Medico-Chirurgical Society may take legitimate pride.

ARMY INDUCTION PANELS

During the period when the Local Board physicians were making detailed physical examinations, there were two fine screens against induction of the unfit into the Army, the Local Board examiners and the Army Induction Center examiners. After the change in procedure, limiting the local

* Williams, G. D. 1943. U. S. Army Induction Board Experience, November 1940-September 1942. Army Med. Bull., No. 65, pp. 105-135, January.

examination to gross screening, the full responsibility for selection rested upon the Army examiners.

To provide the necessary personnel for the increased load on the induction examiners occasioned by the change, the Army Induction Centers engaged panels of civilian physicians throughout the country, at a salary of \$15.00 per diem. When arrangements for these panels were being made, Col. Gray, State Medical Officer for the District of Columbia, and Dr. McGovern, chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs of the District Medical Society, requested permission of the military authorities for appointment to the local panels of a representative number of Negro physicians, both in the spirit of fairness and in recognition of the voluntary service these physicians had already rendered.

The Army did not object to the request and two of nine panels of examining physicians appointed to the Fort Myer Induction Center were composed of Negro physicians. With a few changes and additions these were the same staff as had constituted the Freedmen's Examining Board. Panel A had 11 physicians and 1 dentist, Panel B 10 physicians and 1 dentist, and there were 4 psychiatric consultants.* Dr. William C. Goines acted as Chief Examiner for this group also.

Between January 18, 1942 and October 25, 1944, the Fort Myer Induction Center processed 82,451 white and 45,163 Negro registrants, a total of 127,614. The number examined by each panel is not recorded in available data, but Col. A. C. Gray, now Deputy Director of Selective Service for the District of Columbia, estimates that approximately two-thirds of the Negro and a small indeterminate number of white selectees were examined by our Panels A and B. The

* Personnel was as follows: Panel A, Drs. C. P. Carmichael, J. C. Dowling, T. R. George, W. C. Goines (Chief Examiner), K. A. Harden, U. L. Houston, E. S. Jones, U. B. Martin, K. A. Price, H. L. Stevens and F. A. Turner, Dr. J. E. Bowman, dentist; Panel B, Drs. H. L. Ashley, D. McC. Harper, I. B. Horn, A. R. Hughes, A. C. Lindo, J. O. Miles, G. F. Miller, H. S. Robinson, O. N. Simmons and I. E. Warf, Dr. W. T. Randall, dentist. Psychiatric consultants, Drs. G. Bullock, J. M. Hope, J. S. Perry and E. Y. Williams.

number examined by these panels may therefore be reasonably stated as about 30,100. Both the Army and District Selective Service authorities expressed complete satisfaction with the work of the Negro staff.

TOTAL EXAMINATIONS

The sum of the 34,400 examinations performed by the Freedmen's Hospital Board on a voluntary basis and the 30,100 examinations of the Fort Myer Induction Center panels, who received compensation, yields a total of 64,500 examinations, which may be stated as the local contribution of Negro physicians and their organization, the Medico-Chirurgical Society, to the work of the National Selective Service.

ARMY INDUCTION REJECTIONS

During the period, November 1940 through December 1941, when the Local Board examiners gave a detailed physical examination, Negro registrants from the District of Columbia were sent to Baltimore, Md., for the Army induction examination and white registrants to Richmond, Va. Monthly reports sent to local Boards and their physicians by the State Medical Officer, showed that nearly 30 per cent of the Negro referrals to Baltimore were rejected, while the rejections of white referrals to Richmond amounted to only about 10 per cent. Most of the excess in Negro rejections was due to mental deficiency, illiteracy and mental disease, but even after deduction for these causes, the rate of rejection at Baltimore remained slightly higher than that at Richmond.

Rejection at an Army induction station of men passed by Local Board examiners implies defect either missed by the latter or acquired between the time of the Local Board and Induction examinations, which was generally about two weeks.

The accompanying table shows that the rejection rate by the Army for Negro registrants examined by the Freedmen's Board was the same as that for Negro registrants examined by all other District of Columbia Boards, so that whatever the cause of the differential, all D. C. examining groups, both Negro and white, were affected uniformly by it.

REJECTIONS AT BALTIMORE INDUCTION STATION,
NOVEMBER 14, 1940-JULY 31, 1941*

<i>Local Examination by</i>	<i>Number Sent</i>	<i>Number Rejected</i>	<i>Percentage Rejected</i>
Freedmen's Board	927	276	29.77
All other D.C. Boards	989	296	29.93
Total	1916	572	29.85

Exclusions for mental deficiency and illiteracy were not the specific responsibility of the local examiners and were only crudely made by them, so these rejections may not be charged against them. In respect to venereal disease, there appears no doubt that the relatively large number of exclusions for gonorrhea represented infections acquired between the times of the Local Board and Induction examinations. Such cases were infrequently found at Richmond.

Concerning the slightly higher rejection rate prevalent at Baltimore, even after deduction for mental and venereal causes, it is worthy of note that the panel of examining physicians there was in the atmosphere of one of the leading medical centers in the world and criteria and methodology in examination would be likely to be exacting.

Williams† commented that "if the venereal rate in colored were reduced to the level of the white, total physical causes of rejection in the colored would be 45 less per thousand than in whites," a statement which indicates significantly both a slightly better general physical condition in the Negro and the definite loss to military manpower occasioned by venereal disease in this group at that time.

RACIAL POLICY

In obtaining the services of civilian physicians throughout the country for the Local Board examinations, the Selective Service worked through the local medical societies. In Washington, as has been recounted, the Selective Service approached the Medical Society of the District of Columbia for this purpose and for the first time, that

Society invited the cooperation of the Medico-Chirurgical Society in a common cause. It may be asked if this whole-hearted collaborative endeavor by Negro physicians in an essential war work has acted for the permanent improvement of relations between the two professional bodies.

In reply to this question several statements may be made. Various recent explorations of the attitude of the District Medical Society toward the admission of Negro physicians to the staff of the Gallinger Municipal Hospital and to the District Society have encountered the same adamant opposition which has obtained since the formation of Medico-Chi. The teamwork occasioned by the war has produced no liberalization of opinion in such connections. In this light, the enlistment of the cooperation of Negro physicians in the Selective Service work might be interpreted as a convenience of enlightened selfishness. Without the help of Medico-Chi's physicians, members of the District Medical Society would have had to perform 64,500 additional examinations, a work load which could not have been anticipated with pleasure by already overburdened physicians.

It is to be noted that the way in which the work was done did not require any departure from the entrenched segregation pattern in Washington. We do not know what the attitude of the District Society would have been had the work required the integration of Negro physicians on all the Boards in the same manner as the 130 Negroes on the Metropolitan Police Force are scattered among the several precincts.

Integration of this kind was not attempted, but there is no reason to believe it might not have been successfully accomplished. In the appointment of the Local Selective Boards, Negro representation was conspicuously fairly apportioned. There were, in natural course, all white, all Negro and mixed Boards. One mixed board had a Negro chairman. Dr. William C. Goines, of Medico-Chi, has served on the Procurement and Assignment Board and Dr. C. H. Marshall, also of our Society, has served on the Board of Draft Appeals. It appears that the development of the hospital unit plan for processing registrants rapidly, accidentally fitted the social pattern to which the local community has been conditioned. After the organization of the examinations, the District Medical Society and Medico-Chi rarely

* Table represents author's compilations.

† Op. cit. p. 113. Lt. Col. Williams was then in charge of Selective Service records in the Office of the Surgeon General.

had occasion for contact on the subject, as operational relations were directly with the Selective Service officials. It is extremely doubtful, therefore, if any basic change in relations could be ascribed to or anticipated as a result of the cooperative endeavor necessitated by the examinations. It is certain, however, that the atmosphere of mutual respect and cordiality in which all arrangements were conducted and the efficient performance of the examinations themselves, must be recognized as positive intangibles from which constructive developments may yet accrue.

SUMMARY

1. A collaboration in the interest of the war effort between the Medico-Chirurgical Society of the District of Columbia and the National Selective Service has been described, by means of which examining groups composed of 43 Negro physicians and 5 dentists examined 64,500 registrants during the four year period from September 1940 through October 1944.

2. Of these examinations 34,400 were performed on a voluntary basis by the Freedmen's Hospital examining unit of 33 physicians and 5 dentists. Approximately 7,000 of this number were given the detailed examination requisite during the 13 months from November 1940 through December 1941, and 27,400 received the superficial screening inspection called for during the 25 months from January 1942 through Janu-

ary 1944. This was equal to, if not the heaviest load examined by any of the hospital teams in Washington.

3. The remaining 30,100 examinations were performed on a compensated basis by 2 panels of examiners comprising 25 physicians and 2 dentists, at Fort Myer, Va., Induction Center.

4. The manner of incorporation of Negro professional personnel into this work was unique in the country as a whole and of a kind without precedent in relations between the Medical Society of the District of Columbia and the Medico-Chirurgical Society. The developments have been presented in sequence.

5. As a contribution to the war effort, this work by its members is one in which Medico-Chi may take legitimate pride.

6. The arrangements under which the work was conducted involved no significant departure from the entrenched segregated social pattern of the National Capital.

7. Gauged by current attitudes of the District Medical Society on prewar issues affecting Negro physicians, this patriotic effort has not yet had discernible effect in the direction of liberalizing opinion, though intangible values involved may contribute ultimately to constructive democratic developments.

N.B. The writer is pleased to acknowledge with thanks the kindness of Col. A. C. Gray in verifying certain data and information in this paper.