

HEALTH ISSUES AND THE POPULATION PROBLEM

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I am most pleased to represent the 52,000 national and affiliate members of the American Public Health Association.

The purpose of the 108-year-old American Public Health Association is to protect and promote personal and environmental health. In so doing, it is obvious that issues of population growth, characteristics and distribution cannot be separated from the various personal and environmental health problems with which we public healthers deal daily.

The American Public Health Association has been among the early leaders in policies and actions to attempt to control overpopulation. I find that the APHA Governing Council has adopted policy statements on a number of occasions dealing with the population problem and that these statements, in various forms and content, commenced in 1959 and have continued through the intervening years.

When I ran for election to the Executive Board of APHA in 1975, I noted that overpopulation was one of the major personal and environmental health threats facing this nation and the World. I repeated this same theme when I was nominated for President-Elect of the APHA, and it must have sounded appropriate to members or I would not have been elected.

Perhaps I should note that the APHA has 25 programmatic sections dealing with almost every conceivable aspect of public health. One of these sections is the Population Section and another is the Section on Environment.

As one of the final speakers, it is doubtful that I can say anything that has not been well covered by the preceding speakers. However, it is desirable that the APHA be

identified with such a program as this and that we go on record as supporting efforts to deal with over-population from a personal and environmental health perspective.

It might seem strange for me, coming from the arid Southwestern United States, to state that I have had a concern about population levels and over-population as far back as I can remember. My father was an early-day conservationist with the U.S. Forest Service, and later, with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service. While still in grade school, I had absorbed many of his teachings and had developed a working philosophy about the concept of "carrying capacity." I would walk with him as he pointed out different range plant species, note their "palatability ratings," and mentally convert these into a statement of "X" head of cattle, or "Y" head of sheep for a given area. Therefore, I always knew that every animal species, including the human animal, must live in harmony with its environment and the resources available if it was to survive and prosper on a long term basis. Later, I learned about the concept of "home range," or the space needed by every individual animal if it is not to inflict some type of violence on other members of its species.

Carrying capacity is not only related to space available, but more importantly to resources available. People flying over "empty" areas of the nation and the World may be tempted to think of this as potential expansion space for the human animal while forgetting that water, food, energy and other resources may be limiting factors.

Within the past decade, I have continued to express concern about the problems of over-population in my state and in the southwestern United States and the so-called Sun-Belt in general. Factors beyond our immediate control are causing millions of people to migrate from the Frost-Belt to the Sun-Belt. The resulting over-population is serving to transfer the problems many of these migrants are attempting to leave. We are developing serious levels of air, water, and land pollution. We are witnessing serious deterioration of the fragile environment in our valleys, mesas and mountains. Unemployment is increasing and homicides have become more common than automobile deaths in the largest

city in our State. These and other undesirable societal, economic and health problems are the known and expected manifestations of migration to the Sun-Belt and the resultant over-population.

Perhaps populations should be viewed like a giant amoeba, constantly pushing, probing, expanding, growing, engulfing, and finally destroying in its wake. An environmental barrier to such over-population may tend to halt its growth and movement unless it can expand and move in another direction. It is to keep attempting to adapt the environment and the economy to over-population, when the more rational approach would be to exert greater efforts to controlling this giant amoeba of over-population while we still have some degree of environmental quality remaining.

About a decade back, Life Magazine carried an editorial concerning over-population titled, "Won't Anybody Hear the Awful Truth?" Well, the awful truth still isn't being heard: Political leaders continue to cry for more growth while making futile attempts to solve problems created by or related to over-population. The problems include the energy crisis, pollution, housing, crime, hunger, crowding, deforestation, over-grazing, unemployment, endangered species, restrictions on individual freedom and health threats.

Over-population must be viewed as the number one social, economic, health and environmental problem facing this Nation and the World. Too many political leaders continue to confuse progress with growth. Progress is simply change toward an established goal and does not imply growth.

A few years ago I copied someone's remarks about "popullution" as resulting from two selfish drives:

- 1) Exploitation of the blessing of the Earth in the name of something called progress, and**
- 2) Abuse of the sex drive, which was designed to perpetuate the species rather than destroy it.**

Similar to the principles of the Malthusian Theory, too many members of the human species are already being destroyed by violence in over-populated areas

in the same manner as suggested by laboratory research utilizing other animals. The target group in both cases is primarily young, healthy males in their reproductive years.

Biologically, we know that population will ultimately be controlled by some stress such as war, famine, pestilence, environmental degradation or congestion, if not by rational behavior. People must curb population growth, not for whimsical aesthetic reasons, but for the very self-serving reason that we must protect our environment because it literally gives us life. The Earth and its resources are finite.

I am frequently alarmed by the observation that various types of public health personnel become so engrossed in their immediate day-to-day tasks that they seldom take time to step back from their offices, clinics, laboratories, hospitals and classrooms long enough to relate their endless and frustrating daily tasks to the issue which truly creates the priority personal and environmental health problems affecting all of us -- the issue which has not been fully accepted for preventive programming by our society and legislative bodies--the issue inadequately addressed by traditional public health programs and textbooks--the cause of most of our environmental health ills--the staggering problem of over-population.

Public health and other personnel must realize that the undesirable symptoms of over-population are visible locally and regionally as well as nationally and globally. Even at the municipal, county and regional levels, population levels can be affected or controlled through community attitudes; educational measures; demographic projections; planning, zoning and land-use; fiscal policies; economic incentives; cost assessment to those developmental interests creating growth; and critical analyses of all bond issues to determine if they are allowing, promoting, subsidizing, and/or creating growth. Different peoples and cultures place different values on varying types of environments. Some people value living in apartments in urban areas, using subways, mixing with the masses and enjoying the sophisticated cultural aspects of urban living.

Others enjoy the opportunity of seeing nature through the use of modern recreational vehicles and facilities in company with many others. Still other people enjoy the solitude of backpacking into wilderness areas and arctic-alpine mountain peaks.

We should recognize these varying physical and psychological needs and attempt to provide something for everyone, not everything for everybody.

In 1973, I was asked to discuss the issue of population levels at a meeting sponsored by the Albuquerque, New Mexico Urban Observatory (a metropolitan planning group). I was asked to indicate the impact of over-population on the environment in that area. I answered, in part, as follows:

"You will know when you can no longer see the mountains.

"You will know when you pay more for sewage treatment facilities.

"You will know when traffic problems become worse and it takes twice or three times as long to get to work.

"You will know when you have to move out of the city to find quiet and privacy.

"You will know when you wake up to the constant background of noise that disrupts your sensibilities.

"You will know when you have to travel further to find an uncrowded recreational spot.

"You will know when you must wait in line for hours to launch your boat at your favorite marina.

"You will know when a greater percentage of land is used for freeways and interchanges.

"You will know when all your arable valley land has finally been relegated to subdivisions.

"You will know when you have to ask a computer when you may use a campsite in your favorite recreational area.

"You will know when we experience a constantly increasing number of pollution alerts.

"You will know when it is required that we use mass transit, car pools, or pay, a head tax.

"You will know if the federal government rations gasoline to help alleviate air pollution and energy problems.

"You will know when you finally realize there is no such thing as clean industry if it means more people. More people mean more water pollution, more vehicles, air pollution, and freeways.

"You will know when people talk about retiring to Albuquerque at the same frequency as to Baltimore or Chicago.

"And yes, you will know when people stop bragging about our beautiful vistas, our starlit nights, our sparkling mountain streams, and when they no longer want to move to New Mexico to escape pollution and congestion."

Now, in 1981, that community has experienced nearly all the foregoing.

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We can't really expect to regain former environmental quality once it is lost. We can't continue to grow without sacrificing many of the desirable qualities and amenities.

The human animal is altering and destroying some of the very conditions, environment, and ecological relationships which allowed for the evolution of modern man through toxic chemicals, pesticides, hazardous wastes, air pollution, water pollution, acid rain, deforestation, over-grazing--all related to the demands of overpopulation. The environmental ravages to be experienced by the development of synfuels, the "forever" nature of radioactive tailings and wastes, and the ravages of uncontrolled strip-mining represent other examples of environmental degradation not yet fully understood. Nor do we know the impact of these by-products of over-population on the evolution of Man

inasmuch as the human animal has been exposed to such influences for only an insignificant fraction of his evolutionary development.

With regard to the environment and the economy, let us not be misled into a process of "versus" or "either-or." A quality environment and a healthy economy are not mutually exclusive or contradictory expectations, but in fact, are mutually interdependent. We can't have an economy without an environment. "Ecology" and "economy". are both. derivations of the Greek word "ecos" (oikos) which means "house." An economist was a keeper of the House. An ecologist is the keeper of the house in which we all live -- our environment--the place where we are all going to spend the rest of our lives.

It continues to be a matter of serious concern to me that the human animal sometimes seems more willing to suffer the health, social, economic, and environmental consequences of disease and pollution, rather than paying for environmental quality for this and future generations. Perhaps the human animal can slightly adapt to some degree of environmental degradation, but it is indeed alarming that the human animal might attempt to merely survive through adaptation rather than thrive in a quality environment. Population stabilization is the only real preventive endeavor, since curative programs to control the secondary problems of environmental degradation, energy shortages, transportation, land-use, congestion, crime and famine have not and will not be effective without resolving the basic issues of over-population.

As health and environmental personnel:

We should support specific national and global actions and agreements to stabilize population levels through mechanisms such as education, racial justice, sexual equality, technology sharing, birth control, reorientation of social values and attitudes, demographic research and planning, and economic policies and incentives;

We should sharpen and utilize the tools of environmental epidemiology to better identify the current and future effects of environmental chemicals and stresses inasmuch as we still don't know the effects of environmental diseases on disability, efficiency, morale, comfort, quality of life, life span, absenteeism, insurance rates, Medicaid and Medicare budgets, and other health care costs;

We should understand that the concern of environmentalists with the ecosystem, endangered species, and the natural environment is a sound manifestation of interest in the entire natural system of which the human animal is a part, and that the environmental effects on wildlife and endangered species serve as an "early warning" or "preview of coming attractions" in accordance with the known and proven ecological maxim that "everything is connected to everything else;"

We should realize that society has only recently allowed governmental curative efforts in such environmental problems as water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution, and solid wastes; but has not yet reached the point of authorizing program efforts to effectively resolve problems concerning the basic priority issue;

We should change our collective attitudes and adjust to the fact that "bigger is not better" and that "growth is not progress."

We should constantly consider the sub-clinical, long-term and genetic effects of environmental insults as well as the more obvious clinical effects;

We should have a better knowledge of the cost-benefits of health care as compared with the cost-benefits of a quality environment;

We should not let uninformed and naive politicians foster the erroneous belief that we cannot have both environmental quality and economic vitality;

We should insist that environmental protection standards and regulations be based on the needs of the environment and of man in his environment rather than on the latest polluter-professed "limits of technology";

We should insure that our programs are properly designed and directed to current problems rather than comfortable tradition;

We should recognize that there is a price to be paid for a quality environment, but that this does not result in adverse economic consequences;

We should insist that environmental impact statements be utilized as decision-making tools rather than as mechanisms to justify environmentally adverse decisions already made;

We should think of Man as part of the environment rather than as a supreme being in the environment;

We should constantly remind our citizen and political leaders that environmental quality goes beyond mere freedom from air, water and waste pollution;

We should insist that all governmental leaders at all levels of government develop mechanisms to insure payment of the hidden and long-term costs of growth and pollution now instead of deferring these costs for future generations;

We should continue to emphasize the necessity of stabilizing population and reducing energy consumption rather than considering only the alternatives of continued growth and increasing energy demands;

We should join forces with the ecologists, conservationists and other environmental activists when ever appropriate instead of criticizing these "Johnnies-come-lately" and being intent on territorial defense;

We should increase efforts to better research, understand and control those environmental factors that create health problems;

We should cooperate more effectively with citizen groups and accept the fact that citizens actions have been desirable stimulants and have spurred laggard regulatory bodies into action;

We should demand that no significant environmental deterioration be permitted beyond current levels inasmuch as the environment, once degraded, is seldom restored;

We should guide national policy and priorities so that population stabilization and development of solar energy resources prioritize as high as putting a man on the Moon;

We should protect our environment in such a manner that future generations can enjoy the thrill of fresh brisk air, wilderness areas, trout in clear mountain streams, uncluttered mesas and vistas, wild geese on a cold morning, and solitude on a mountain peak and, finally;

We should insure that population stabilization is an integral component of many health and environmental programs as well as a basic and required emphasis for planning bodies such as Health Systems Agencies, State Health Planning and Development Agencies, Statewide Health Coordinating Councils, and Councils on Environmental Quality:

California-born writer Richard Armour penned the following doggerel:

**"So leap with joy, be blithe and gay, or weep my friends with sorrow;
What California is today, the rest will be tomorrow."**

In the mid-1800s, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "They (Americans) may finally become so engrossed in a cowardly love of immediate pleasure that their interest in their own future and that of their descendants may vanish and they will prefer tamely to follow the course of their destiny rather than make a sudden energetic effort necessary to set things right."

Such an "energetic effort" regarding over-population and "carrying capacity" should be considered the number one priority for all health and environmental personnel.