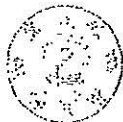


ESTADO LIBRE ASOCIADO DE PUERTO RICO

OFICINA DEL GOBERNADOR

LA FORTALEZA, SAN JUAN



MESSAGE OF GOVERNOR RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON
BEFORE THE FOURTH DISTRICT OF THE COLLEGE OF
OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS - SAN JUAN,
PUERTO RICO, OCTOBER 19, 1973.

I am very pleased to welcome you to Puerto Rico. We are honored to play host to such a distinguished group of professionals. I hope you will enjoy your stay with us, and I am sure your conference will - excuse the expression - give birth to new knowledge, new experiences, and new friendship.

We in Puerto Rico welcome with enthusiasm your kind of conference that generates and stimulates discussion of our most urgent health problems. As a people, we are deeply concerned with the health and welfare of our fellowmen. As a government, we have always given community health top priority.

Puerto Rico has pioneered in the fields of public health, free medical care for low income families, and voluntary birth control, among others. We have, in the second half of this century, made giant strides in our fight against diseases that once scourge this Island.

In 1941 the mortality rate for malaria was 124.9 per 100,000 population. Today, we do not have a single case of malaria. The most recent case, in fact, was 18 years ago.

Our fight against tuberculosis has been equally dramatic. The 1940 death rate for tuberculosis of 260.2 per 100,000 population has dropped today to 6.9 per 100,000.

There are still others indicators that fully demonstrate the progress in the state of health of our people. Our mortality rate of 6.5 per 100,000 is among the world's lowest. Our life expectancy of 72 years is among the world's highest.

Still, we are not satisfied. This has not been enough. The social ills of rapid industrial progress -- such as pollution, and drug addiction, for example -- present new challenges to the medical profession as well as to responsible government.

We are also faced with our people's expectations for prompt and efficient medical care. They are demanding what in this day and age should be a guaranteed right of every citizen. They naturally want access to all the scientific and technological advances now available in medicine.

To meet these challenges, we in Puerto Rico have committed ourselves to search for new and innovative ways to improve health services for all of our citizens.

We have embarked on an extensive study to explore the various possibilities for the establishment of a universal health plan for Puerto Rico. A special

commission was appointed six months ago and I expect a report will be forthcoming very shortly. It is our hope that once all aspects of such a program have been properly examined, we can come up with a realistic plan -- equally satisfying to physicians as well as to the public at large.

Any universal health plan most, of course, emphasize the maintenance of good health throughout the community rather than merely focus on the care of the sick person.

Modern medicine, as you all well know, is no longer a narrow concept restricted to its curative aspects. It reaches out to practically all phases of life. Modern medicine is seeking the same basic goal sought by modern, responsible government -- to procure a satisfying living environment in which the average citizen can develop his full potentiality.

In Puerto Rico, today, there is still an urgent need not only to extend and improve medical services, but also to educate more of our people in self-preventive measures to avoid disease and illness. And although the need is urgent, let me assure you, that we are not rushing in with ill-considered concepts and programs. We are moving rapidly but cautiously. Common sense as well as our limited resources dictate that we act prudently. We intend to maintain medical excellence and we intend to justly reward our medical talent.

Let me conclude, ladies and gentlemen, by wishing you the greatest success in your deliberations. My hope is that when you leave Puerto Rico, you will have had a memorable experience here. I know that your fellow professionals in Puerto Rico will take good care of you -- and I surely hope they will see to it, that you allocate some of your time to enjoying our climate and scenery. Puerto Ricans are friendly and hospitable people and we take particular pleasure in making our fellow citizens from the mainland feel right at home here.

Thank you for listening and good health to you all.