

## STATEMENT OF DR. FELIX J. UNDERWOOD, STATE HEALTH OFFICER OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I should like to give this committee the benefit of the facts, so far as Mississippi and a few other States are concerned relative to lack of adequate public health facilities and medical care.

Beginning December 1932 we had in Mississippi 2,069 deaths reported to the division of vital statistics of the department of health. Four hundred and ninety three died without medical care, 23.8 percent of all. To be exact, 9.1 percent white and about 33 percent colored.

Senator COSTIGAN. Without any medical care whatsoever?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. No medical care whatsoever. A physician did not see them in the office before they became extremely ill, and certainly there was no visit and their death certificates were not signed by a physician.

Senator GERRY. Is that an accurate death rate?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I think so.

Senator GERRY. As to the number of deaths?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. We have that many reported. There were possibly a few that were not reported.

Senator GERRY. That percentage is not large?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. That percentage is quite large.

Senator GERRY. The percentage in deaths not reported, I mean?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. Oh, no. I think we get 95 to 98 percent. We are within the registration area of the United States and that means that we are reporting quite well for deaths and births.

Senator COSTIGAN. Does that mean that the local physicians do not respond?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. No indeed. It means that the physicians had a peak load of charity when this depression struck, and with the added amount of grief and trouble, they simply could not do it. They should not be expected to without compensation.

I have it month by month for 1933. We had a total of 21,617 deaths for 1933; 4,004 without medical attention or 18.5 percent of our total that were not seen by a physician at all and their death certificates were not signed by a physician.

For 1934, I have it compiled through October.

The medical care by the Federal Government inadequate as it has been has helped considerably. October 1934, as against December 1932, which was 23.8 percent of all. October 1934 was 13.6 percent of all died without medical care.

The CHAIRMAN. So there was a reduction?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. A reduction.

The CHAIRMAN. How do those figures compare with other States?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. Arkansas shows for 1933, 15.29 percent died without medical care, 2,537 deaths without medical care; 16,591 total for the year of 1933.

The CHAIRMAN. You have a certain number of States there?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I have Georgia, 13.8 percent.

The CHAIRMAN. I wish you would put that in the record.

Senator GERRY. What is Alabama?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I do not think I have Alabama. Some States did not keep it. I believe it is practically the same. Dr. McCormick is here, the State health commissioner of Kentucky, and his State averages about the same.

The CHAIRMAN (interrupting). Have you any State there that has large cities in it? Of course, our State is an agricultural State. Have you any such figures?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I do not have. I wrote to every State health commissioner in the country and received replies from most of them, but the figures are from less than half the States, and I have here a few of the States as a sample.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you have New York State?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. No. Dr. Parran can speak for New York.

The CHAIRMAN. Are there any statistics on that?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I am sure they have them or can get them. Some States said they did not keep them. I asked them for those statistics by months. I have Georgia, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Kentucky, and a few others that run along about anywhere from 10 to 20 percent.

Senator GERRY. Then you have no comparison of those States with the important industrial States?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I do not, sir; I am sorry. I wanted to show the actual condition in Mississippi, my own State, and the thought occurred to me it might be well to write to other States and see what the conditions were there.

The point I am making here is that possibly half of those could have been prevented by an adequate health service and good medical care.

The assistant secretary of the Health Board of Mississippi prepared this statement the other day. It will take only a minute to read it here.

Some aspects on the need of medical care in Mississippi—

First. Over half of the births in Mississippi are annually attended by midwives. A tabulation covering several years and representing this particular point is enclosed.

Of course, our population is about half Negroes. The tabulation covering several years and representing this particular point is as follows:

*Births 1928-32*

	Total	White	Colored
Number births attended by physicians:			
1928.....	26,359	21,619	4,730
1929.....	24,852	20,371	4,581
1930.....	25,818	21,231	4,587
1931.....	23,184	19,378	3,806
1932.....	22,138	18,932	3,206
1933.....	21,159	17,685	3,474
Percent of total number births attended by physicians:			
1928.....	54.7	91.4	19.3
1929.....	54.5	91.7	19.5
1930.....	53.8	91.5	18.5
1931.....	51.4	89.6	16.2
1932.....	47.6	86.5	13.0
1933.....	47.9	86.7	14.6

## Births 1928-32—Continued

	Total	White	Colored
Number births attended by midwives:			
1928.....	21,315	1,776	19,539
1929.....	20,335	1,621	18,714
1930.....	21,843	1,777	20,066
1931.....	21,719	2,127	19,592
1932.....	24,106	2,798	21,308
1933.....	22,762	2,564	20,198
Percent of total number births attended by midwives:			
1928.....	44.3	7.5	79.8
1929.....	44.6	7.3	79.8
1930.....	45.5	7.7	81.0
1931.....	48.1	9.8	83.4
1932.....	51.9	12.8	86.6
1933.....	51.5	12.5	84.9

Lack of 100 percent in the totals of percentages above is due to lack of information and to records of births signed only by parents.

Second. Most of the midwives in Mississippi are ignorant women who cannot be expected to know the first principles of obstetrics except the teaching they get with reference to cleanliness and calling physicians in unusual cases. As to how much of these teachings they have absorbed is a matter of question since their lack of education and previous mode of living cannot guarantee great results.

We have been prosecuting some people in Mississippi who attempted to do midwifery without license. The medical practice act of the State is to the effect that females engaged solely in the practice of midwifery are exempt from examination, that is the medical practice act of the State exempts them. Only physicians and females engaged solely in the practice of midwifery may do that kind of practice. One case is pending in court wherein a white couple used a Negro man to attend the mother at childbirth. Another case is pending in court with reference to a white man who has never studied medicine attending births in his section for several years. Another case was in court where an ignorant colored man had attended births, and the information shows that he had been attending births among colored women for years. Several cases have come to court where fakers have been practicing medicine and knew nothing of the principles of practice, of course.

It is quite evident that people who patronize such questionable practitioners would have physicians if they could pay them.

Recently I wrote to a local registrar of births at Union, Miss.:

DEAR SIR: We recently received two birth certificates from you signed by J. W. Rogers, Union, Miss. These were for children of William E. Edwards, born October 19, 1933, and of Robert Sharp, born July 14, 1933.

Will you please state at the bottom of this page who J. W. Rogers may be, whether a man or woman, and if a man, is he attending births in your section?

To which I got his reply:

Mr. J. W. Rogers is a very old farmer who is trying to help his neighbors who are not able to get a doctor in maternity cases. He has been pressed into the service from a humanitarian standpoint. I understand he makes no charges as his patients are not able to pay.

You can imagine how we would stand before a jury prosecuting a man practicing medicine without license under those circumstances in a community like that.

The CHAIRMAN. You would not get very far.

Dr. UNDERWOOD. Still it is the duty of the board of health to prosecute such individuals.

In our health work, we have had many letters testifying as to its great value. Here is one from a Mrs. Ogden. I have a few samples of a great many letters that I have had recently. This woman owns one of the largest plantations in the Mississippi Delta. And she writes voluntarily:

MY DEAR DR. UNDERWOOD: It occurs to me that you might be interested from a health standpoint in the results of the drainage projects laid out last year on my plantation by Mr. Nelson H. Rector.

In the summer of 1933 I suffered so many losses in man-power and money from long and severe cases of malaria that I wrote Mr. Rector and asked if he would come over and run levels so that I could drain the sloughs and lowlands. Mr. Rector promptly responded, and the levels were run on part of the place. He found that much of our drainage was ineffective and made changes accordingly.

We followed Mr. Rector's program as far as our finances would permit, expecting to complete it gradually. While we were working the C. W. A. fortunately for us, came in and dug two of the major ditches included in the program.

As what I consider a direct result of this drainage, we have not had a single case of malaria on that portion of the plantation during the year 1934. My books bear me out in this statement. They do not show 1 doctor's bill for malaria nor 1 grain of quinine. Heretofore on this part of the place there has been a constant expense for malaria and resultant maladies.

My books show that tenants on other parts of the place have had the usual medical care and quinine for malaria.

We have been fortunate enough to get Mr. Rector to run levels on another portion of the plantation this fall, and Mr. Ogden, and I hope to be able to continue the work.

I am writing this letter to you in appreciation of the work you and Mr. Rector have done for me, and I hope that others will avail themselves of the opportunity of this splendid service.

With kindest personal regards, I beg to remain,  
Cordially yours,

FLORENCE SILLERS OGDEN.

Mrs. Ogden is a sister of the Hon. Walter Sillers, a member of the Mississippi Legislature.

Not only will it control malaria definitely there, but other diseases; that sometimes malaria will undermine the resisting power of the human body, and tuberculosis and other conditions will arise.

The CHAIRMAN. How much have you reduced malaria in Mississippi? What are the percentages?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. This has been a bad year for malaria, this past year and 1933; but in spite of that fact, we have had a reduction, and all our cases have been reduced more than 50 percent, and the deaths more than that—probably 75 percent over the past 10 or 12 years.

The CHAIRMAN. Over a series of years, you have greatly reduced malaria?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. The cases probably 60 percent and deaths 75 percent, because we do not have the malignant types that we once had at all, but I wanted to show definitely what malaria-control work would do against that particular disease.

The CHAIRMAN. What appropriation is there in Mississippi for public-health service?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. \$325,000 for 2 years, for the biennial period.

The CHAIRMAN. Is that about the average of the States in that vicinity?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I think Mississippi has less than Louisiana and Alabama, less than Tennessee, and about on a par with Arkansas.

As to immunization and school work, we have testimonials from school teachers and others that will show the increased attendances of children in school programs, and I think that, in my judgment, gentlemen, \$10,000,000 is a most reasonable sum. The appropria-

tion, as I understand it, for the Public Health Service is about \$10,000,000 now, perhaps \$5,000,000 or \$5,500,000 spent for marine-hospital service, which is necessary, and in my judgment should be continued, and should be continued under the Public Health Service, but I do not think it is a proper charge against public health per se; so you are not doubling the appropriation for public-health work proper when you give an additional \$10,000,000 for the extension of preventive measures throughout the Nation.

Congress was very wise in making many investments that have been made—prevention of scabies in sheep and screwworm control in cattle, cholera in hogs; yet I feel that while Congress is protecting the citizens' livestock, the citizen himself and his family certainly should have equal protection—I think better protection.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there some further statement you desire to make, Doctor?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I intended only to make some general observations and answer any questions that I could. I regret very much that I did not have a complete record of all of the States, but I believe State health officers everywhere in the country will bear me out that conditions, so far as medical care are concerned, will be about what I have stated for these States that we mentioned.

The CHAIRMAN. If you desire to extend your statement, you can do so in the record.

Dr. UNDERWOOD. At least half of this trouble could have been prevented by adequate care. If the extension of public health had been done years ago, we could have met this, at least in part, in Mississippi, by adequate health service. We have 82 counties in Mississippi, and only 25 of them have organized full-time health work. That shows the need for this extension.

The CHAIRMAN. That is about the average of the other States, too?

Dr. UNDERWOOD. I should think so. Some States have more than that; but the country over, that is a good average. Many States have only 1 or 2 organized community health services, others 10 or 12, and some as many as 75 percent of their counties are already organized; but a general average of 25 or 30 counties to the State, I believe, would be fair at this time. Certainly in Mississippi we ought to be able to—with the Federal and State and local appropriations—to organize the 82 counties. That is true of all other States.

The CHAIRMAN. All right; that is all. If you want to put anything else in the record we would be very glad to have you do so.

The committee will recess until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

(The following were filed in connection with Dr. Underwood's testimony:)

STATE OF GEORGIA, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH,  
*Atlanta, Ga., August 10, 1934.*

Dr. FELIX J. UNDERWOOD,  
*Mississippi State Board of Health, Jackson, Miss.*

DEAR DOCTOR UNDERWOOD: In compliance with your request of August 8 for the number of deaths in Georgia without medical attention I wish to state that the tabulation of these deaths by months of occurrence has not been made.

In 1933 there was a total of 31,185 deaths. Of this number 5,281 occurred without medical attention. Excluding deaths from external violence there were 4,312 without medical attention.

Yours very truly,

BUTLER TOOMBS,  
*Chief Bureau of Vital Statistics.*

ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF HEALTH,  
Little Rock, August 16, 1934.

Year	Total number of deaths	Deaths without medical attention	Percent
1933			
January.....	1,711	164	9.58
February.....	1,319	137	10.38
March.....	1,295	131	10.11
April.....	1,224	148	12.09
May.....	1,213	180	14.84
June.....	1,464	275	18.78
July.....	1,428	210	14.70
August.....	1,365	255	18.72
September.....	1,327	182	13.71
October.....	1,562	212	13.57
November.....	1,379	342	24.80
December.....	1,304	301	23.08
Total.....	16,591	2,537	15.29

*Mississippi*

Year	Total number of deaths	Deaths without medical attention	Percent
1932			
December.....	2,069	493	23.8
1933			
January.....	1,905	404	21.2
February.....	1,609	309	19.2
March.....	1,925	389	20.2
April.....	1,679	290	17.3
May.....	1,588	311	19.6
June.....	1,911	310	16.2
July.....	1,824	320	17.5
August.....	1,706	313	18.3
September.....	1,537	356	19.4
October.....	2,008	365	18.1
November.....	1,814	303	16.7
December.....	1,811	334	18.4
Total for 1933.....	21,617	4,004	18.5
1934			
January.....	1,681	321	19.1
February.....	1,740	293	16.8
March.....	1,875	301	16.1
April.....	1,675	278	16.6
May.....	1,708	216	12.6
June.....	1,822	266	14.6
July.....	1,767	254	14.4
August.....	1,640	246	15.0
September.....	1,497	222	14.8
October.....	1,575	214	13.6

KING & ANDERSON, INC.,  
Dickerson, Miss., August 23, 1934.

Dr. FELIX UNDERWOOD,  
Director, Jackson, Miss.

DEAR DR. UNDERWOOD: I read your recent circular letter with much interest and sympathetic understanding of your position as head of the health department of the State. Certainly no department of the State government is of more vital importance nor should have more financial and moral support than that one which encourages healthy living, collectively and individually.

I wish you to know that I have persistently combated all efforts that have been made in this county to weaken the efficiency of our health department and while I know this department of working under a handicap of reduced budget

allowance, far below the value of the services rendered there is certainly no let up of the effort being made to make the county department a success.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) JOHN C. STEVENS.

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MONTICELLO PUBLIC SCHOOL,  
Monticello, Miss., February 15, 1934.

Mr. Q. EDWARD GATLIN,  
State Board of Health, Jackson, Miss.

DEAR MR. GATLIN: We want to express to you and the State board of health our appreciation for the fine work you did in this community to eradicate the hookworm.

Before the examinations were given, we had several children who were dull, sluggish, and barely passing their required school work. Since the treatments were given, these students have been more active, doing a better grade of work, and have a much better color in their faces. Teachers are very much pleased to see the improvement these students are making from day to day.

We appreciate your many courtesies and work and hope to have you visit us again as well as the county health officer when you can help so much in caring for the health of our children.

Yours very truly,

E. L. BOOTH.

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JANUARY 2, 1934.

Mr. C. E. WATKENS,  
Hazlehurst, Miss.

DEAR MR. WATKENS: I have kept your nice letter on my desk since it was received—October 23, 1932—and have read it several times.

One statement impresses me a great deal:

“Especially is it difficult to measure results what might have been different but for preventive measures, but which do not show up on the credit side of the ledger because of their absence.”

If people could realize this, how different many things would be. Would that all our legislators and members of Congress reasoned along this line. Some are prone to think that the incidence of disease is becoming less each year, so why spend the taxpayer's money to prevent disease. It never seems to pierce their consciousness that the program of education, sanitation, and vaccination is responsible for the lack of disease and that a lessening of the watchfulness and precautions means an increase of sickness and death from preventable diseases.

I want to assure you that I greatly appreciate your letter—words of encouragement are seeds of inspiration in these times when so many things stand as obstacles to progress in public-health work.

It is regretted that your county is discontinuing its health department—an appropriation of only \$600 more than was already appropriated would have saved it. We didn't have it and the Copiah County Board of Supervisors could not put up the amount. This is a step backward in Copiah County in the protection of the health and lives of men, women and children.

With best wishes, I am,

Very truly yours,

F. J. UNDERWOOD, M. D.

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LELAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS,  
Leland, Wis., May 13, 1933.

Dr. FELIX UNDERWOOD,  
State Board of Health, Jackson, Miss.

MY DEAR MR. UNDERWOOD: Our schools here will close down next Friday, and I am taking the liberty of writing you to thank you again for having sent us your Dr. Perry to serve in the absence of Dr. Shackelford. We have learned to love Dr. Perry, and I feel that we have been very fortunate in having had his services in our schools for the past year. Dr. Perry is an excellent doctor; is tactful, aggressive, intelligent, loyal, and thoroughly capable; and he has done an excellent piece of work in Washington County. I wish it were possible for us to have two doctors on the job here in order that we might be able to induce Dr. Perry to stay with us.

Dr. Perry has recently concluded his work in our preschool clinic, and we had the largest and best clinic we have ever had. As a result of the preschool clinic, we find that our attendance in the first year of a child's school experience has been greatly increased. We have had fewer retentions and "repeat students" than ever before. If a county could be brought to realize that a doctor practically saves his salary on this item alone, no county would be willing to do without a full-time health unit. The work of our doctors and nurses in Washington County has been outstanding, and I, personally, am keenly appreciative of your interest in us and of the very excellent services rendered our schools by the State board of health.

Again assuring you of my sincere appreciation of all that you have done for us, and with every expression of sincere regard, I am,

Faithfully yours,

"JIM" (J. G. CHASTAIN, JR.)

FARMHAVEN, MISS., *March 30, 1934.*

DR. FELIX J. UNDERWOOD,  
*Jackson, Miss.*

DEAR SIR: Let me express to you my appreciation, as well as that of my entire community, for the services that your department rendered for us in the giving of the vaccination for diphtheria and typhoid fever. Of course the value cannot be expressed in dollars and cents, for the value of human lives is not measured in that manner.

This is a service that every community throughout the entire State needs. We feel fortunate, indeed, that we are one of the few communities which has had this service. How I wish that other communities might have it. My past experience and work as a school man, community worker, and leader makes me feel and see more vividly the need of such work. I trust that our legislature and that Congress will increase the appropriation so that you may be enabled to do more in the future.

Thanking you and your staff for these services to our community, I am.

Yours truly,

L. W. OWENS,  
*Superintendent Farmhaven School.*

(Whereupon at 12:05 p. m., an adjournment was taken until 10 a. m., Tuesday, Feb. 5, 1935.)