LBJ's Message on Youth: Pointing a New Path for Medical Practice

One of the most persistent criticisms of American medical practice is that its manpower resources are inefficiently deployed and utilized. On 8 February, the President, in an unusual message on "Children and Youth," proposed a remedy for dealing with part of the problem. He called specifically for the setting up of ten pilot centers to develop "more efficient methods and techniques of health care delivery" and "to train new types of health workers."

At the heart of the Administration plan is the concept of the "physician assistant," a person who will probably possess educational training somewhere between that of the registered nurse and that of the physician. The new presidential support for physicians' assistants stems from a realization that the supply of physicians is insufficient to cope with the rising expectation of adequate medical care for all, explained Philip R. Lee, Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. "We have come to the conclusion that expansion of existing programs would not meet our needs," he said in an interview.

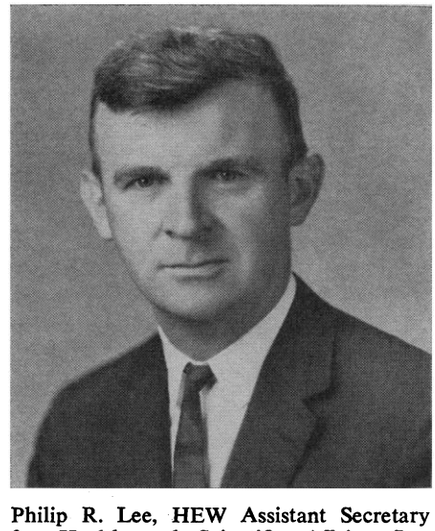
Lee vigorously backed the program for training physicians' assistants as he emphasized the point that the new physicians' assistants would not be "physician substitutes" but would always work under a physician's direction.

For the fiscal year beginning 1 July, the Administration will ask for $10 million for the pilot centers; for the following year, it plans to request $33 million. Lee said he hoped that the new pilot centers would be in operation by the first part of 1968 at the latest, and said he expected that they would initially train about 150 assistants. The assistants will probably enter training after having received baccalaureate degrees in the natural sciences, Lee speculated, although he did not wish to exclude the possibility that people with lesser educational attainments might be trained for the positions.

The proposed pilot centers will probably be connected with universities, but will not necessarily be located at universities. Lee, and his Deputy Assistant Secretary, George A. Silver, expressed admiration for work and research in the training of new types of medical personnel at Duke University, the University of Florida, Harvard, the University of Washington, Temple University, and the University of Colorado. Lee anticipates a major involvement of private enterprise, including the aerospace industry, in the development of the new centers. He points with interest to the study currently being done by the Lockheed Missiles and Space Company for the Mayo Clinic to determine the feasibility of the application of computers to the clinical practice of medicine, on both an in-patient and out-patient basis.

As well as expressing a desire for a new kind of worker to aid physicians, the President gave his backing to a $5-million pilot dental program which would help train dental assistants, explore better methods of furnishing care, and provide dental services for 100,000 children in poor areas.

The President's program for youth also contains a $3-million increase (to $10 million) to provide funds for the training of pediatricians, obstetricians, and family doctors, but Lee makes it clear that his division is not now placing its primary stress on increasing the numbers of physicians. "We have to carefully examine the way physicians practice," he said; "we have to come to grips with the organization of medical services." Lee hopes that the pilot medical centers will provide a "new matrix" in which physicians can practice. Lee said the centers might help promote a greater upward mobility in the health professions; "Being a nurse is now a dead-end occupation; we have to try to break down these vested interests and permit greater movement."



Philip R. Lee, HEW Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs. Lee is a graduate of the Stanford School of Medicine and was Director of Health Services for AID in 1963–65.

Lee and Silver say that their ideas have received a sympathetic hearing among a variety of physicians' groups, but that the pediatricians and the orthopedic surgeons have been most receptive. "Some independent physicians have expressed grave reservations and antipathy," Lee said, but he expects that the Administration's proposals will not be opposed by the American Medical Association or other professional groups.

Lee believes that the medical profession and the federal government now find it much easier to work together than they did in the days of the struggle over Medicare. "The whole climate is changing," Lee said; "it may be changing too fast for us to cope with it." The officials explained that there is now a much greater sensitivity in the medical schools and among practitioners to the increased demand for medical services.

One factor which is forcing the federal government toward faster action in the medical field, Lee said, is the fact that "We have developed much better tools for measuring health status." Silver notes that the principal areas of governmental interest are the "health-depressed areas—the urban ghetto and the rural depressed region," areas whose deficiencies have become more measurable in recent years. Another factor impelling greater governmental concern with the medical profession has been the implementation of Medicare, Lee explained; "The federal government now has much more responsibility to see that the money is wisely spent."

In his message, the President expressed his conviction that the federal government had a responsibility to help diagnose and treat problems early—in the very first part of life. "There is increasing evidence," he said, "that a child's potential is shaped in infancy—and even during the prenatal period." To help the young, the President made a multitude of proposals in addition

to his medical suggestions. These include a major pilot program of child and parent centers, to be run by the Office of Economic Opportunity, and a $135-million "follow-through" to expand Project Head Start into the lower grades.

As well as pointing to changed directions in the organization of medical practice, the President's message makes several specific requests for increases in health funds. The largest increase will be a $100-million jump (to $221 million) in the request for medical care for needy children under the Medicaid program. The crippled-children and mental-retardation programs are also to be expanded; the latter will include the first federal support for the staffing of community mental-retardation centers.

The President's new medical programs for children and his requests for increased funding are important, although they are not as striking as the major medical legislation of 1965. Arthur J. Lesser, Deputy Chief of HEW's Children's Bureau, explained in an interview that "the climate is not ripe for bold, big new programs" because of high costs elsewhere, including that of the Vietnam war, and because "Congress does not seem in the mood" for such expenditures. On the other hand, Congress in the past has shown itself favorable to the improvement of health conditions, especially among children. HEW officials expect little difficulty with this year's requests.

Even if modest in amount, the children's program proposed by the President may eventually have striking implications for the medical profession. "These programs may not be especially significant this year," Lee said, "but potentially they can be very significant."

Lee, an energetic 42-year-old Californian, has yet to complete his second year as a top administrator in the health and science area of HEW. Already he has helped encourage important changes in medical programs, and he seems committed to the need for much more substantial innovation. With the backing of a President who has often expressed his desire to improve medical services, Lee and other HEW officials may eventually achieve some success in their efforts to help bring about a self-transformation in the organization of the powerful and well-established American medical profession.—BRYCE NELSON

Social Sciences: Harris Bill Evokes Limited Support

Last week Senator Fred R. Harris (D–Okla.), chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Research, called in a number of federal officials to testify on his bill to establish a National Foundation for the Social Sciences (NFSS). But, as was the case last year, when he solicited the views of academicians (*Science*, 28 October 1966), the response was generally tepid.

What the Senator has going for him is the general feeling that something should be done to expand the volume and utilization of the social sciences, and, further, to reduce their dependence on military support. Since the Camelot fiasco (*Science*, 10 September 1965) this last consideration has loomed large in discussion of federal support of research in the social sciences, although, according to NSF tabulations, the Defense Department provides less than $16 million of the $325.7 million that the federal government is spending this year on "social science" and "social psychology." However, the military does predominate in "foreign area" research, and probably far more so than is readily apparent when CIA's hidden contribution is included.

Whether present appropriations are a lot or a little in terms of good ideas and people to carry them out is a subject that draws no more attention in the social than in the physical sciences; in both areas the prevailing opinion is that more is needed. Nevertheless, outside the Senate, where Harris's bill, S. 836, has acquired 18 cosponsors (including Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and the two Kennedys), the Senator is yet to elicit very much support. In fact, many of the intended beneficiaries of his bill are privately puzzled about its origins and uneasy about the mechanisms that it would create for assisting their professions.

In brief, the foundation proposed by Harris would parallel the National Science Foundation to the extent that it would have a distinguished advisory board drawn from outside government, a presidentially appointed director, and broad authority to support research in the social sciences. But then it goes its own way. For example, unlike NSF, the proposed foundation would not be expected to play any part in education or training, areas in which NSF, by wide agreement, has filled an enormously valuable pioneering role. Harris's rationale for this departure from the NSF model is that funds for such purposes are available through the National Defense Education Act and other recently instituted or expanded federal programs for education. The fact that NSF's money has really been secondary to the stimulation and leadership it has provided for educational activities —ranging from reforms in high school curricula to postdoctoral fellowships— seems to have had no impact on the Harris formulation.

The proposed foundation would also serve, upon request, as a sort of filter to remove any taint from military-sponsored or politically sensitive research abroad in the social sciences. This arrangement, obviously inspired by Camelot-type episodes, would be implemented through a process by which other federal agencies could transfer to the foundation the funds they wish to spend on foreign projects. The foundation would then dispense the money, but only if the foreign government concerned did not disapprove of the project; such proxy operations, however, could not exceed 25 percent of the foundation's annual expenditures.

At last week's hearings, praise for the potential of the social sciences gushed forth, but, when it came to the question of whether Harris's bill was a wise means for attaining that potential, the witnesses were generally skittish. Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz, for example, said that "The present development of research in the social sciences falls so far short of both its potential and of the imperative neces-