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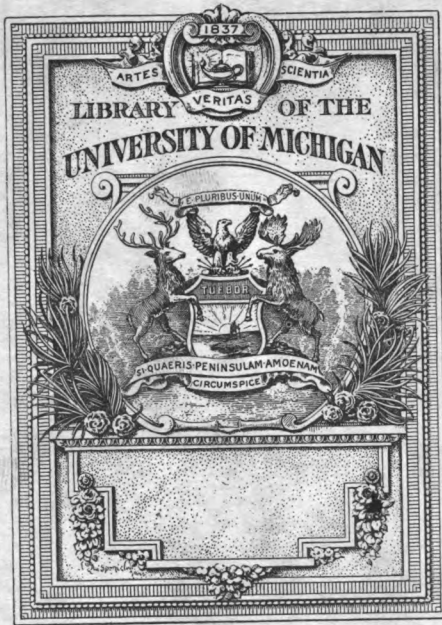
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
U.S. BUREAU OF EDUCATION

REPORT ON HEALTH CONDITIONS  
AMONG THE NATIVES OF ALASKA

By EMIL KRULISH

Passed Assistant Surgeon, U. S. Public Health Service

WASHINGTON : GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1918



## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
BUREAU OF EDUCATION,  
*Washington, D. C., January 25, 1913.*

SIR: In March, 1912, upon the request of the Secretary of the Interior, the Surgeon General of the Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service detailed Passed Assistant Surgeon Emil Krulish for services in Alaska under the Commissioner of Education.

Dr. Krulish immediately proceeded to Alaska, and spent from April to November investigating health conditions among the natives of Alaska, with a view to inaugurating adequate measures for their relief.

Dr. Krulish has recently returned to Washington, and has submitted to me a full report of his work, which will be submitted for publication in due time. He has also prepared a summary of his report for immediate use. I consider this summary of so much value that I recommend its publication.

Very respectfully,

P. P. CLAXTON,  
*Commissioner.*

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

# REPORT ON HEALTH CONDITIONS AMONG THE NATIVES OF ALASKA.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
BUREAU OF EDUCATION, ALASKA DIVISION,  
*Washington, January 22, 1913.*

SIR: I have the honor to submit the following report and recommendations relating to the natives of Alaska.

My detail in the Territory has enabled me to inspect the settlements of the Indians on the southeastern coast and upper Yukon River; of the Aleuts along the southwestern coast and in the vicinity of Cook Inlet; and of the Eskimos on the lower Yukon and on the coast of Bering Sea.

In my inspection I endeavored to examine as many natives as possible, and in these examinations special effort was made to determine the number suffering with tuberculosis, trachoma, and venereal disease. In addition, I made a personal study of the sanitary conditions in the villages, and interviewed physicians and other persons who possessed any knowledge of the conditions that I was interested in.

## DISEASES.

Sanitary conditions and the prevalence of disease vary somewhat in different sections of Alaska; syphilis is most prevalent in the southwest, eye diseases in the southeast, while pulmonary tuberculosis I believe to be most common among the Eskimos.

I found the following conditions and diseases present in the native population: Trachoma, keratitis, cataracts, blepharitis, conjunctivitis, corneal opacities, blindness, heart disease, stomach troubles, adenoids, tonsillitis, hysteria, paralysis, locomotor ataxia, pneumonia, pleurisy, tuberculosis, scabies, impetigo, syphilis, scrofula, rickets, rheumatism, epilepsy, ptomaine poisoning, and gonorrhoea. Erysipelas, smallpox, measles, and infantile paralysis have occurred in epidemics.

## EYE DISEASES.

Eye diseases are most common in the southeast. About 23 per cent of the natives in this section show evidence of eye trouble; while the Eskimos, the least afflicted, only 6 per cent.

Trachoma is a chronic disease of the eyelids, very contagious, and if neglected causes much suffering and may result in blindness. This disease is most common in the southwest (13 per cent). Trachoma is classified as a dangerous contagious disease by the United States Public Health Service, and immigrants having this trouble are not permitted to enter the United States.

I believe that 80 per cent of the blindness and partial loss of vision among the Alaska natives could have been prevented if these cases had received proper treatment in the early stage of the disease.

All cases of trachoma should be removed to hospitals for treatment, for while at large they are a menace to the community. The eye being a delicate organ, all treatment of eyes should be performed only by physicians and experienced trained nurses, as much harm may result from interference by inexperienced persons.

#### SYPHILIS.

It is rather difficult to determine accurately the number of natives having syphilis, for the symptoms of this disease are not always manifested externally, even when present within the system. A large percentage of blindness and corneal opacities are due to the inherited type of this disease.

In my opinion, the only practical method for treating syphilis in the natives is in hospitals, by the intravenous injection of Salvarsan (606); this treatment has been tried and has given wonderful results. Unfortunately, in southwestern Alaska, where this disease is most common, this treatment can not be administered, because no hospitals are available.

#### TUBERCULOSIS.

Tuberculosis is the principal disease, and if not eradicated in the near future will exterminate the native population of Alaska in the course of 60 to 70 years. All forms of tuberculosis (pulmonary, osseous, glandular) are present. The percentages of tuberculosis and the type of disease vary in different parts of the Territory; the pulmonary form is most common among the Eskimos, while tuberculosis of bones is most prevalent along the southern coast. I have seen a number of cases of spinal tuberculosis followed by paralysis, which condition could have been prevented by proper and timely treatment.

I am of the opinion that 15 per cent of the native population is infected with tuberculosis, including all forms and both the active and latent type; while in 7 per cent it is present in the active stages.

The home conditions are responsible for this infection, for in the crowded, unventilated rooms all eat from the same dish, drink from the same teapot spout, use the same towel, and expectorate on the

same floor. It is there that the principal danger of contagion exists, and it is there that tuberculosis, trachoma, and syphilis are most frequently contracted.

#### VITAL STATISTICS.

According to the United States census of 1900 the native population of Alaska was 29,536; in 1910 it was only 25,331, a decrease of 4,205, or 14.5 per cent.

Dr. M. H. Foster, in a report to the Commissioner of Education, dated August 11, 1911, states that at Sitka, where presumably accurate records of births and deaths have been kept by the churches, for a period of 5 years and 7 months the annual birth rate has been 72.3 per 1,000 and the annual death rate 85.4 per 1,000, showing a decrease in population of 13 per 1,000. During the year 1912 the birth rate was 24 and the death rate 29.3 per 1,000, a decrease of only 5.3 per 1,000.

This improvement in the Sitka village, which is an example of the improvement in other sections of Alaska, I attribute chiefly to the influence and efforts of physicians, nurses, teachers, and hospitals now under the Bureau of Education. It demonstrates the fact that the outlook for the general improvement of the native is encouraging and the task feasible. Give the native a white man's chance and I am positive that he will respond equally as well.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS.

Medical relief for the native is necessary and urgent. The tubercular, syphilitic, and trachomatous should be removed to properly equipped hospitals for treatment. Trained nurses should be employed for field work; a nurse should remain in a village for a sufficient period to treat and cure the minor ailments, discharging ears, infected sores, and inflamed eyes. A portion of her time should be devoted to education—teaching mothers the proper care and feeding of infants, preparation of food, cleanliness in the homes, the necessity of ventilation, the proper collection and disposal of tubercular sputum, etc. This work is just as important and necessary as that performed in hospitals.

#### PRESENT MEDICAL SERVICE.

The present medical service in Alaska is entirely inadequate to the demand. At present there is no appropriation available for the erection of hospitals, although these institutions are necessary for the proper treatment of the cases. The physicians who are now employed are working at a disadvantage in buildings which are unsuited for the treatment of sick; but even with this equipment good results are being accomplished. The present medical work should therefore be extended and placed upon a firm and permanent basis.

### HOSPITALS.

The solution of the medical problem in Alaska is, therefore, the establishment of well-equipped hospitals, the employment of physicians and nurses, the isolation of the infected, and the education of the native in hygiene and sanitation.

The area of the Territory of Alaska is one-fifth of that of the United States, and transportation facilities are inadequate and expensive; the erection of one central hospital is therefore impracticable. I recommend, therefore, that a chain of small hospitals be established along the coast and on the Yukon River at points most convenient to the greatest number of natives. The sick can then be sent to the nearest hospital at little expense. In my estimate I have indicated the points which to my mind would serve the greatest number of people at the least expense.

As a part of these hospitals, the erection of fair living quarters for the physicians and nurses, with as many of the comforts and conveniences as possible, is as essential as the accommodations for patients. Many of these places are isolated, the treatment of the native is not always pleasant, and the persons engaged in this work should receive encouragement and consideration. There is no inducement for competent and reliable persons to enter this service if they are to be underpaid, or if they are to be without comfortable living quarters and compelled to work without the necessary appliances, drugs, and assistants.

Such hospitals may be utilized also for training native girls in nursing. As an experiment, I consider it worth the trial to detail suitable girls to these institutions for this purpose.

### EXPENSES.

The estimate of the appropriation required for the erection, equipment, and maintenance of these hospitals, for salaries of physicians, nurses, and attendants, traveling expenses, drugs, and supplies for the first year is \$274,600; the cost of maintaining this service in the future, after the buildings have been provided, would be approximately \$160,000.

It is very important to meet this medical problem in Alaska immediately, earnestly, and on a permanent basis, while the percentage of contagion and cost of the work are comparatively low and within control; otherwise the situation may become more serious and even equal that of the Indians of the State of Oklahoma, of whom 50 per cent have recently been found to have trachoma.

*An appropriation of at least \$125,000 is required in order to begin this work with an efficient organization. With this amount the hospitals which are now operated may be improved and continued, two new hospitals may be erected at places where most required, and the entire field may be supplied with physicians, nurses, and drugs.*



**CONCLUSION.**

The native of Alaska, like the Indian of the States, is being gradually deprived of his natural means of support; each succeeding year the old native finds it more difficult to provide for himself. The Government has recognized this fact, and by providing schools and establishing reindeer herds is endeavoring to assist the coming generation to cope with the new situation.

With the advent of the white man into the Territory the native has contracted his diseases, with the result that tuberculosis and venereal and eye diseases are degenerating and depopulating the race. "Health is better than wealth" applies to the native as it does to the whites. Of what value are schools if the pupils they educate may not live to benefit by the education?

It is bad economy for the Government to maintain schools without hospitals. The native of Alaska is as much in need of medical treatment as he is of education; these are inseparable, and both are essential factors to his welfare. Cure him of his ills, teach him to live properly and under sanitary conditions, and he will profit by the education received in schools, become a worthy citizen, and continue to be self-supporting.

In conclusion, I desire to express my thanks for, and appreciation of, the hearty cooperation and assistance given to me by the officials of the Bureau of Education and the teachers of the Alaska school service.

Respectfully,

EMIL KRULISH,  
*Passed Assistant Surgeon, U. S. Public Health Service.*  
(On special detail.)

The COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION.



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