

HEW Shakeup for "Payoffs"

President Johnson's plan to rationalize the monster department matches pressures emerging from both the Congress and the grass roots.

by Barbara Culliton

PRES. JOHNSON is shaking up one of the Government's biggest, most sprawling and fastest growing agencies to insure, among other things, that the public get the "payoffs" from biomedical research he has been demanding recently.

A radical reorganization of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) is already under study at the White House to make HEW a "more modern, efficient, economical operation." Streamlining HEW is intended to "rationalize" the efforts of U.S. health services and channel the billions of dollars appropriated yearly into more services for the people.

HEW Secretary John W. Gardner specifically recommended the agency be subdivided into three departments—Health, Education, and Individual and Family Services—each to be headed by an assistant secretary responsible directly to him.

A separate division for Health would provide much needed coordination of efforts among Public Health Service, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health, the three largest agencies operating in health fields, Dr. George Silver, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs at HEW told SCIENCE SERVICE. "We have neither enough money nor enough competent personnel to continue supporting a fragmentation and duplication of efforts in scientific research," he said.

If FDA is to meet the increasing demands placed on it to effectively regulate the drugs and foods approved for public consumption, it will need more and better people. A rational division of the brain power already at work for the government could help fill in the gaps. Under Dr. James L. Goddard, FDA's hard-driving chief, greater reliance is already being placed on the scientific skills housed in PHS.

The development and regulation of pesticides, for example, currently in the hands of several agencies including PHS, FDA and the Department of Agriculture has been slowed by virtue of the fact that too many people are engaged in the same activities, and nobody seems to have the central authority to straighten it out.

HEW, organized in its present form in 1953, was supposed to bring coordination and unified control over government agencies concerned with "health, education and social security." As a result, it is made up of separate

units of varying interests and expertise, many of which are virtually autonomous. All this leads to duplication, disorganization and minimal progress.

In view of the government's growing commitment to assure health care for all citizens, as evidenced by the estimated total \$10.3 billion it will pay out in cash in 1967, a House subcommittee headed by Rep. Paul G. Rogers of Florida, urged a simplification of the federal organizational structure to bring about improved cooperation among federal, state and local operations.

This matches an early promise by Pres. Johnson for a "functional reorganization of the government," of which the coming HEW shakeup is only a part.

Federal health agencies are failing in their prime responsibility to meet the growing needs of the people for better medical services, the subcommittee stressed after its year-long investigation. Much of the fault lies with inefficient operation, it said.

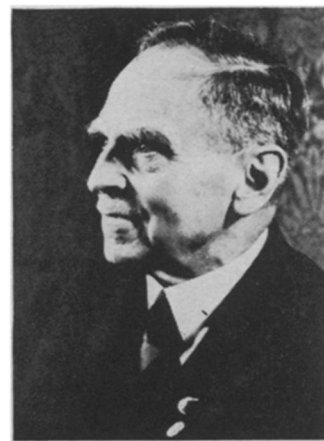
No HEW Secretary has yet managed to pull together all the divisions and tangential powers in the amorphous Department. When Sen. Abraham Ribicoff resigned the post a few years ago, he parted saying the department ought to be dismembered. Secretary Gardner's job is to consolidate it.

As things stand now, when the need for new health programs arises, Congress appropriates the funds and decides who shall administer them. Some of the fragmentation of research and programs could be eliminated if Congress would allocate funds for a specific purpose and then let HEW distribute them for the "best and most reasonable division of labor," Dr. Silver said.

But Congress is jealous of its power and the many subcommittees overseeing the activities of various Federal operations may be reluctant to relinquish their guardianship, particularly in areas involving appropriations for state and local programs.

However, a reorganization of HEW will not necessarily affect the funding procedures for such projects, Dr. Silver reported. It is likely to facilitate them in many ways.

As yet there has been no extensive discussion in Congress of the proposed redesign of HEW, but spokesmen report fairly general support of the plan among Congressmen with whom the issue already has been raised.



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