

Medicine in the mud for Poor People's March



Resurrection City residents, still lacking water lines, wash clothes in cans.

Plagued by cold, rain, mud, sewage, trash, lack of water and angry non-black minority groups, Resurrection City has at least been spared one trouble—medical neglect.

The medical services available to 3,000 marchers of the Poor People's Campaign are one of the few reliable facts of life at the plastic and plywood camp in Washington's Potomac Park. They are as complete and efficient as several hundred medical volunteers can make them, in chaotic conditions.

The population of Resurrection City, led to Washington by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to demonstrate for food and jobs, is continually changing with new arrivals and some returnees.

For free dental and medical care, a resident of Resurrection City has only to walk 50 yards outside the camp to a pair of health vans. Two volunteer doctors staff the medical van on each of four shifts around the clock. Resurrection City runs through 56 physicians a week. A third van, inside the camp, is run by Seventh-Day Adventists.

If necessary, the resident can be sent to one of several hospitals in Washington that have agreed to take the marchers. D.C. General Hospital has so far treated 100 people, most of them with stomach trouble or toothaches. Freedmen's Hospital has treated about the same number. Only 13 marchers have stayed for in-patient treatment, including a pneumonia case and a birth.

In the evening, six to midnight, a

resident may seek out one of two psychiatrists, also volunteers, who maintain a clinic at Resurrection City seven nights a week. No shelter for the clinic has yet been built. "We've been interviewing people out on the grass and in any little nook or cranny we can find," says Dr. Robert Abramovitz, a coordinator of the mental health committee for Resurrection City.

The D.C. Health Department, meanwhile, provides immunizations, chest X-rays, skin and blood tests. Some 200 people have been immunized against measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and polio.

People in Resurrection City are probably receiving better medical care than the average person in Washington, says Dr. Arthur Frank, co-chairman of the local chapter of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, one of the groups volunteering service to the SCLC's medical committee. "It's right on the spot and there is no cost."

Certainly, the marchers receive better medical care than most have had at home. Their previous care, explains Dr. Frank, was "incomplete . . . relatively nonexistent."

Medical screening has turned up a fair amount of pathology, "from hemorrhoids to heart disease," says Dr. Frank. The first 119 chest X-rays on the marchers indicate a higher-than-normal rate of pathology—about 10 percent—frequently enlarged hearts, suggesting chronic cardiac trouble, and old lung scars. So far, however, no

active tuberculosis has been found.

Medical people are also finding malnutrition among the residents, but no figures are available to indicate how many people suffer from it. One aim of the campaign is to force a change in the Government's food programs, to get more food to the poor. An estimated 10 million people in the United States suffer hunger or malnutrition.

At the campsite, medical service from dentistry to psychiatry is designed to offer rapid, convenient diagnosis and simple treatment. Psychiatrists, for instance, have been dispensing mild relaxants against anxiety and sleeplessness due to the stresses of long travel.

Many of the people who come for help—and there are not many—are reacting to dislocation, says Psychiatrist Abramovitz. "There has been no really serious stuff." He points out that, normally, people living under the overcrowded and weather-desolated conditions of Resurrection City could be expected to have psychiatric problems. But the camp has a social system, including a city hall, manager and community meetings, as well as a unifying purpose.

"It has the aura of a temporary engagement. If someone can't manage, he can always go back home," says Dr. Abramovitz. The context is quite different from that of an urban ghetto, which lacks both escape hatch and purpose. "Here the motivation and determination to be involved is going to help sustain people."

But trouble has arisen among ethnic groups. Indian Americans, recently arrived from the Southwest, have declined to enter Resurrection City. Mexican-American leader Reies Lopez Tijerina has accused the predominantly black city of humiliating and discriminating against others. But a quick meeting between officials of SCLC and Tijerina appeared to mend some rifts.

Black exclusiveness troubles Resurrection City in other ways as well. The SCLC wants the health vans located inside the camp. But the D.C. Health Department will not allow it unless health employes are allowed direct access to the medical area. Employes have had trouble getting into the city; camp marshalls have barred them.

HORMONE SYNTHESIZED

Calcium controller heals bones

By the time astronauts take off on long-term space flights their problems of calcium balance caused by weightlessness may be solved by a new thyroid hormone being synthesized on both sides of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, the substance offers hope to earth-bound sufferers of bone disease. The synthetic