SOME INDICATIONS THAT MAY SERVE FOR THE BETTER UTILIZATION OF THE RESULTS DERIVED FROM A COMPARISON OF THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF DEATH IN THE CITIES THAT APPLY THE INTERNATIONAL NOMENCLATURE.

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At the request of Mr. Wm. A. King, chairman of the special committee on "Demography and Statistics in their Sanitary Relations," I now have the honor to submit to the study of the learned members of this society, certain points that may be of service for the better utilization of the results of the comparison between the principal causes of death in the cities which make use of the international nomenclature that has been introduced by the eminent statistician, Dr. J. Bertillon.

Nobody can to-day doubt the importance of statistical data, which, of all the branches of knowledge, has so greatly contributed to the study of human nature. It exercises an important influence on agriculture, industry, trade and science in all its branches.

The most important reports relating to the actions of men, which are now admitted by everybody as unquestionable truths, are derived from these statistics.

It is based on an immense collection of facts collected from all parts of the globe, expressed in the clearest language and in the form of arithmetical tables which are prepared by an official staff that has no previous theories or prejudices with respect to those facts, and consequently, is in no way interested in altering the truth of them, or in the form in which they are presented.

The data that serve for the formation of the statistics, become more valuable in proportion as they are collected with increasing uniformity, which renders their comparison easier and less liable to error. This uniformity ought to exist, not only in each individual country, but also in all countries in general.

Statistics throw a light on the most difficult and important social problems, and for this reason, all nations endeavor to make use of that light. But the importance of their results demands that all nations should agree on a common action, or in one word, statistics ought to be international in character. This is the reason why the most advanced nations in the world have already adopted a uniform system of nomenclature for disease and death, and this Association
has taken an important part in this great and beneficent work, that
gives such splendid results for public hygiene, the principal object with
which our Association brings together the eminent and learned men,
who in a great part of our continent occupy themselves with this
science, that now controls everything, protects human life, lengthens
it and renders it more perfect and agreeable; whose splendid ambition
it is to suppress disease, to convert drugs into a poison for our
enemies; to depopulate the hospitals and utilize cemeteries only for
those persons who die of old age or unavoidable accidents. This
ideal constitutes our program and it is the sense of our obligation
to work for its realization that has brought us in this meeting. But
it is not enough to have adopted the same system of nomenclature;
it is necessary that the results obtained in each country, should be
collected simultaneously from time to time, and that we should em-
ploy similar definitions, methods and tables. It is necessary that the
statistical data should be circulated among all nations as soon as
possible, in order that the hygienic laws indicated by those data, should
be promptly understood and enacted, and that steps should be taken
to defend the inhabitants of a country from any other that is infected,
and such laws or regulations be promptly applied.

For this purpose each nation ought to publish a weekly, monthly,
quarterly and annual bulletin, in which we would find recorded the
last census tables, the meteorological data, those relating to births,
maririages and deaths; the cases of transmissible disease, the measures
taken to combat them, etc.

Bulletins of this character are already published in some countries,
and I have published mine for more than ten years past. (Copies of
bulletins were presented with paper.)

In order to arrange these bulletins, it is necessary to commence
by obtaining the most perfect uniformity possible in the medical cer-
tificates, and in the event of the physicians being too negligent to
furnish these data in a proper form, it becomes necessary to apply
to the registry offices for copies of the registers which contain the
information that has been omitted by the physician.

These first data ought to be received, revised and carefully collected
in the statistical office, in which the bulletins above mentioned should
be edited, avoiding all interference on the part of any person who
has not the necessary experience and knowledge of such work. In
some countries, the political authorities are charged with part of the
collection, but these agents ought to be eliminated and the statistical
service properly centralized.

In some countries the physicians are opposed to giving complete
information as to the cause of death, on account of their obligations
to preserve professional confidence. This is a conscientious scruple that it is undoubtedly desirable to respect provided that it is not to the prejudice of public health, and in such case, the medical certificate might be given in such a way as to leave it to a certain extent anonymous, or in other words, the desired information could be supplied without giving the name of the deceased person. At the same time, I repeat that professional confidence must never be allowed to obstruct the free application of the measures which are intended to prevent the propagation of transmissible diseases.

In the cases of patients who have died without medical attendance, the cause of death ought to be proved by a post-mortem examination and the information that could be furnished by the relations or friends of the deceased; but under no circumstance should the burial permit be issued without a medical certificate that will show the cause of death.

In order to render these statistical data more exact, care should be taken in the collection that has to serve for the editing of the bulletins, and dedicate to them three columns, as I do in mine; one showing the deaths that have occurred in private houses and with medical attendance, another for those that have been attended in the hospitals, and another in which no medical attendance has been received. There can be no question that the diagnosis made in the hospital will generally be more correct and precise than that made by the physicians in private practice, and both will be more exact than those which are made after a simple examination of the body in a private house.

In view of the above arguments, I have the honor to propose that this Association adopt the following resolution:

Resolved. The American Public Health Association recommends that all the countries which employ the demographic statistics of international classification for diseases and deaths, should publish four bulletins, which would be weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual, similar to those which are published in Belgium.