EXPERIENCES DURING THE EPIDEMIC

I.

INFLUENZA AT CEDAR BRANCH CAMP

BY ANNE L. COLON, R.N., *Newberry, Michigan*

Shall I tell you about how we took care of the influenza in a logging camp in the deep woods of northern Michigan, of the difficulty we had in reaching the patients, and what we accomplished?

No, our big cedar and balsam and hardwood forests, our fresh breezes from the Great Lakes, and our isolation from the crowded districts did not save us from the deadly grip of the epidemic. We read about the big cities, the suffering, and the many deaths, but still sat back; so fearless were we, and so sure of our wonderful healthy climate, that it wasn't until a cry for help came, that we were awakened from our dream.

Our first trip was to Cedar Branch, a camp fifteen miles in the woods. Now fifteen miles in the northland would equal twenty or more in any other place; a mile is a good long distance in Michigan. The roads leading to camp are narrow and winding. There are mud and water and lots of bumps. It is an interesting kind of road where you might expect anything to happen.

The afternoon was clear and bright when I started for camp with the health officer, Mr. Browne. A county nurse can do many things, but I must admit she can't run a machine in the heavy timberland without a driver. I had never been in a big forest before, there is something so wonderful about the trees, years and years old. Mr. Browne told me as we rode along, that every year during hunting season, several men are lost and never found, in these same beautiful woods. After some hard travel we reached camp.

Cedar Branch is a typical logging camp composed of a group of log cabins and tar paper shacks, all built near together in a friendly sort of way. The people are a fearless, careless, wandering tribe, followers of the great out-of-doors with little idea as to home-making and not any conception of sanitation. They have large families which usually live in a one-roomed cabin.

I shall never forget the conditions we found. Influenza was traveling like wildfire through the little huts. There was confusion, suffering, and terror everywhere. The sick and well were all huddled together. In many cases the family had only one bed, so we used rough heavy cloth, sewed the four sides, slit one side in the middle, these we filled with straw and used for extra beds. There was a roaring fire in each house, the windows were nailed down, and the doors shut tight. The people were afraid of a bit of fresh air, and it took

a good deal of tact, and in some cases force, to get air to them. Another of our greatest difficulties was to stop their careless spitting on the walls, on the floor, and everywhere. The way we did check it was to place a tin can on a chair beside each bed and make them use them. These cans were burned each day and fresh ones given. At camps they use a great deal of canned food, so one can always find a good supply of them. We could not get to camp every day, but during our absence we left several responsible women to see that all went well. We saw to it that these women were well instructed, for life and death hung in the balance.

Altogether we had between forty and fifty cases at Cedar Branch, and we lost only one thirteen-months-old baby; that was a better record than at many of the neighboring camps.

When we started back on that first day, the sun was deep in the west behind the cedar swamp and night came upon us quickly. It was a very dark night, we did not have a moon and there was not a single star to light our dark road home. The night was so very black that I begged to take a lantern along. We made very good progress toward home for an hour or more and things went along well. Our lights barely cast a shadow on the road and the lantern didn't seem much help, still we were getting along. While I was thinking about these things, we took a sharp corner, there was a bang, smash, and a sudden stop. Our engine, steering gear, lights, and front wheels were broken. We had missed the road on a curve and dashed upon a stump. It all happened in a second, but we knew we were six miles from Cedar Branch with a broken machine, hungry, tired, and the walking bad. Certainly it was not a good ending for a perfect day, still as one consolation, we had our lantern left.

There was nothing to do but to walk back to camp. Mr. Browne walked ahead with the lantern to light the way and keep out of the mud puddles, and I trudged wearily behind. On through the dark night we wandered; we made a poor attempt at cheerfulness but failed. I noticed that the light from our lantern kept growing dimmer and dimmer and finally it went out. Mr. Browne looked surprised, shook the lantern, and "No oil" was the dry remark that seemed to match admirably the rest of the hard luck of the night. Now the darkness was so black that it was positively thick, and I understood how men could be really lost and suddenly realized the truth of Mr. Browne's story.

Mr. Browne said that it would be bad if we met a bear or a wolf because we didn't have a gun. Oh, horrors! I had never thought of that; it made the cold shivers run up and down my spine and the road under my feet seemed to sway back and forth; I had a sickening fear

that I was going to faint. I fought hard and fast to draw myself together to meet the emergency and I allowed myself to be led on and on, not with a brave and fearless heart, but with that spirit from old New England, *"I cannot fail."*

I wonder if you realize how awful it is to be really lost in an endless forest when you had been used to brightly lighted city streets all your life. Can you appreciate the feeling of helplessness and loneliness, the fright that makes your heart pound madly? You imagine all kinds of horrible things; your feet are like lead, yet something seems to drive you on, you lose all sense of direction, and yet you blunder insanely on.

Just when all seemed lost, a light appeared, just a dim and tiny speck shining bravely in the night, but oh, it meant so much. I am sure that I shall never forget that candle in the window which may guide and cheer some poor lone wanderer alone in the night.

Finally we arrived at the camp, and the man in charge took us home in his machine.

And so we fought influenza under most trying conditions. We did not have a trained worker, and our patients and camps seemed hopelessly far apart, still we worked long, hard and tirelessly and felt that we had not only checked the epidemic, but had succeeded in teaching lasting lessons in sanitation and prevention of disease.

II.

A TWO WEEKS' ASSIGNMENT

BY M. K. B., *Florida*

Although an enrolled Red Cross nurse, awaiting call, when the influenza epidemic started, I went to Southern Division headquarters and asked to be assigned. I was sent to North Carolina, reporting to the secretary of the State Board of Health. From Raleigh, Dr. Rankin sent me to Morehead City, a village of about three thousand inhabitants, situated on Bogue Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. About two-thirds of the inhabitants are fishermen and their very large families. There also is located the home of the North Carolina Ship Building Company, employing at this time about five or six hundred men.

There were three physicians and a small hospital of twenty-five rooms, but this institution was soon filled to the utmost capacity. From the superintendent and her pupil nurses I received the heartiest cooperation, but after a few days, every pupil nurse became ill, and the bulk of the twenty-four-hour duty fell upon the shoulders of the superintendent; the cook developed influenza, and aides could not be had at any price.

A mass meeting was held in the Red Cross rooms where we organized for work. The town was divided into districts, each district having a committee to make house to house calls, the chairman of each committee reporting to me the new cases, and any family needing special care or supplies; I in turn sent a report to each of the physicians, morning and evening. I was on duty nearly twenty hours a day, the first three days after my arrival, and from fourteen to eighteen thereafter, only going off duty when I could no longer stand.

A soup kitchen was established and several hundred people were served three times daily. The Scout Master was ill, but the Boy Scouts rendered aid that can never be forgotten, as the food was delivered by them to the families where there was illness. From the beginning, the physicians, (with the exception of one), the volunteer nurses and I, wore face masks, made and furnished free by the Red Cross.

All schools, churches and moving picture houses were closed. The stores were opened for ten hours, daily, but not more than six people were allowed in a store at a time. Public funerals were not permitted.

In the colored section of the town, there developed very few cases, but the colored Red Cross chapter was active and rendered great aid to its race. An automobile and driver were placed at my disposal by the ladies of the Red Cross, else I could never have accomplished the work I was able to do. Great emphasis was placed on the need of fresh air, cleanliness, and nursing care, in every home that I entered.

The mayor, the ministers, the superintendent of the graded school, his noble wife, and every member of the faculty, responded to the call for aid, and because of their excellent care, the mortality was very much less than it would have been otherwise. We fitted up an emergency hospital in the Center School building, but were unable to use it, as a great many of our volunteer nurses became ill, and we felt that the people could be cared for in their homes by the convalescent members of their families and friends, better than in a hospital with no nurses. Of the three graduate nurses sent to the town previous to my coming, two developed influenza, and the third was called home to care for her immediate family the day after her arrival.

In a home where the income was sufficient to ensure comfort and a few luxuries, we found neither; the children were almost without clothing, scantily fed, and dirty beyond recognition. On Sunday afternoon, the president of the Ship Building Company, with three practical nurses (developed by the influenza) and I went into a house of four rooms that beggars description. Mr. C. removed his coat,

bathed and dressed two men, and helped clean the cottage. In one room lay a woman, the dirtiest white human being that I have ever seen. The husband seemed to feel very little responsibility, although he worked regularly and made $5.00 a day. A daughter, by a former marriage, lay in a room across the hall, with her ill husband, the two being on a single bed. A son ill with influenza and having an attack of gall stone colic was in another room. With a generous supply of hot water and soap, borrowed from a neighbor, we spent almost the entire afternoon in cleaning the cottage and the people. The beds were bare of sheets and pillow cases, but some new cotton blankets and bed linen were procured for each of the beds from Mr. C. I felt more than repaid for my efforts by the expression on the face of the little two-year-old baby girl, after I had bathed her and dressed her in clean fresh clothes. Her little head was covered with vermin and her dear little body was emaciated for lack of proper food, but she was the only member of that family that escaped the influenza.

Considering the lack of space, it was remarkable that so few cases of pneumonia developed, for the majority of the cottages had only three rooms, a great many of them only two. In one room, the family, consisting usually of from five to eight children and the father and mother would sleep on two beds. The one redeeming feature was the abundance of fresh air, because of the numerous cracks.

III.

INFLUENZA IN A KENTUCKY COAL-MINING CAMP

By Beulah Gribble, R.N.

Leaving Chicago on the 9:30 A. M. train, October 24, we arrived in B—— the next noon. This is a coal-mining camp in southeast Kentucky, and is beautifully located among the mountains. A branch of the Cumberland River flows through the valley and the little cottages are built on the narrow level strip of land along the river, and up the mountain sides. These cottages are of four rooms and are very comfortable,—having good light and ventilation. This camp is owned and the mines are operated by one of our large industrial companies. There are 2,500 inhabitants and up to the time the epidemic came, they had been in good health.

We found that the two doctors had been confined to their homes on account of the influenza for several days; they were just returning to their work. Miss F., the nurse, had been doing the doctoring and nursing, working day and night. We could not say enough for one who had worked so faithfully under such discouraging conditions, and although at the time we arrived she was tired and over-worked,

she had not thought of giving up. The estimated number of sick was 600; 200 were employes.

We met that afternoon and divided the camp into three parts, each nurse taking a part. We carried medicines and gave them to the patients as the doctors had instructed us, for it was impossible for them to call at all the homes, so it became necessary to do more than nursing. We gave nursing care as far as possible, and to others we gave medicine and instruction. Our medicines were aspirin, calomel, and castor oil, C. C. pills, or other cathartics.

I called the first afternoon at twelve homes and found from one to six patients in each, all very sick. Their temperatures were as high as 105 degrees in many cases. Conditions were distressing, due not only to the sickness, but to the fact that the doctors could not get to all to give them medical attention. Neighbors helped each other in giving food and general care wherever possible, and in several homes where there was no one to assist, Miss S., the "Y" secretary, sent soup which was made at the "Y" building.

The following day, two doctors came from Chicago, and two nurses from Camp Taylor. That night a doctor from the State Board of Health came, and finding that we had what he considered so much help, he took those nurses to L., an adjoining camp.

Some of the people lived in queer, out-of-the-way places and it was impossible to see them as often as necessary, and in families where every member was sick and there was no one to do anything, other means had to be employed. Therefore, we decided to turn the "Y" building into a hospital, and move the sickest patients there. This building was a most acceptable hospital, having a large entrance hall with a large room on either side. In one room we had the women and children and in the other the men. There was also a room upstairs where we put convalescent patients. On each floor was a toilet room, and on the first floor was a small kitchen. The whole place was very convenient and the Company did everything, sparing no expense in getting good care to their people.

Seventeen patients were brought in on Sunday afternoon, October 27. As there was no ambulance department in the camp, the men went out with stretchers and brought in the patients. In one instance we took in a whole family, father, mother and six children. When I left all had recovered except the two babies, who were slowly improving. Before starting the hospital, there had been only two deaths, a baby and a colored man. Everyone in camp assisted in preparing the building for a hospital. The men cleared out the rooms, scrubbed floors, then brought in the cots, while the teachers cleaned and scrubbed the kitchen and toilet rooms. While they were doing this, the women in

their homes were making sheets, gowns, and numerous other necessary things. Everyone was busy helping.

We then arranged to have Miss M. assist the doctors in the homes, Miss F. taking the hospital day work and I, the night. About this time Miss S., the "Y" secretary, was confined to her bed at the hotel, but the school teachers continued the diet work under the doctors' and Miss F.'s instructions.

Tuesday noon, two other nurses came from Chicago and as we now had 25 patients and more help was needed in the hospital, they gave two hours in the morning, helping with the usual morning work. They then went into the districts, coming back again about 4:00 P. M. to sponge for temperatures or to do whatever was required. On Tuesday afternoon we had a death in the hospital, the only one. The greatest number of patients in the hospital at any one time was 28, but many new cases had developed in the homes. We continued taking into the hospital the worst cases, dismissing others to convalesce at home. I continued doing the night work with the assistance of a colored man, a tall, big-handed teamster who made an excellent orderly. He did a little of everything,—watching patients to keep them in bed, and covered, (especially children), carrying water, bathing the patients' hands and faces in the morning, keeping up the fires. The patients complained of aches and pains, loss of appetite, and they were very restless, lying awake for nights. The disease had an odor quite as characteristic as the typhoid odor.

We could only estimate the exact number of patients, but there were at least a thousand, with only twelve deaths. The people, with the exception of a few, were English-speaking, very pleasant, kind, and appreciative of our efforts. After about eighteen days, conditions had greatly improved, the sick were better, and few new cases developed, so Miss M. and I were dismissed from the nursing force.

The work was hard and depressing, but well worth while. We slept at the town's one hotel, a clean, well kept inn that served excellent food. Every one in town was good to us and eager to help, and after the worst was over, we were glad to have had our share in it.