

Promoting Children's Health: The Battle Against Disease



Improving the health of our nation's children has always been one of the fundamental purposes of PTA. Over the years, PTA has focused on a variety of children's health issues: nutrition; infant health; physical activity; drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; school lunches; child labor; sex education; and others. For the past century, and continuing to the present day, the PTA magazine has served as a reliable source of information on these topics. Readers have been able to count on finding clearly written, research-based articles describing the fundamentals of children's health. The magazine has also regularly featured health programs that PTAs throughout the country could implement in their communities.

PTA rallies its resources

Some of the most extensive PTA campaigns have focused on disease prevention. One principal concern in the earlier part of the 20th century was tuberculosis. Later, in the 1950s, polio was a major health threat to children and youth. Its effect on children could be lifetime disability or, in far too many cases, death. One of the most high-profile projects in PTA history was PTA's participation in the field-testing of the Salk polio vaccine in 1954. During and after the field trials, thousands of PTA leaders assisted in administering the polio vaccine to more than 1.8 million children. This PTA effort provided a foundation for cooperative partnerships with medical associations and health organizations for decades to come.

Here is an excerpt from an article published in the PTA national magazine in 1954. Written by the president of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (which later became part of the March of Dimes), the article lays the groundwork for PTA's involvement in what the author identifies as "the largest demonstration of cooperation ever achieved between lay and professional volunteers." **OC**

Where PTA Stands Now

Children's health continues to be one of the primary concerns of PTA. For current resources on protecting and improving children's health, visit www.pta.org.

Volunteers and the Attack on Polio

Sixteen years have brought such heart-lifting progress in polio research that today we are planning the largest volunteer project in the annals of public health in this country. In 1954 the National Foundation [for Infantile Paralysis] will test a trial vaccine against polio....

The projected trials represent the practical fulfillment of the dreams of three million March of Dimes volunteers, eighty million voluntary contributors, thousands of physicians and educators in all parts of the world, and hundreds of scientists in their laboratories around the globe. They represent your dreams, too—the dreams of P.T.A. members everywhere who make up your vast and effective organization....

As I envision the scene in at least two hundred counties throughout the United States next spring, I anticipate a tremendous demonstration of the American spirit. Hope and faith will be there, yes, but in addition there will be *practical teamwork*. A willingness to work and work hard is essential to success. And there will be no reward other than the lifelong satisfaction of having contributed to a project that may turn out to have results of immeasurable value to the whole American people.

Whatever the results of the study, it will be the largest demonstration of cooperation ever achieved between lay and professional volunteers. And to you, who are wise in the ways of voluntary action, I need hardly outline what a vast amount of work there will be for these volunteers....

These are stirring days in the fight against polio. Whatever the results of the field trials—and we have faith in those results—the trials themselves make a glorious drama of the American spirit of voluntary action for the common good.

An excerpt from "Volunteers and the Attack on Polio," by Basil O'Connor, president of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. The full article was originally published in January 1954 in PTA's national magazine, then titled National Parent-Teacher.