

Memorandum

MAY 19 1963

To: The Secretary

From: Director, Office of Territories

Subject: Measles Epidemic in the Trust Territory

An alarming situation appears to exist in the Trust Territory. Our information concerning it is neither full nor reliable, but I write to report that which we do know, because you may have inquiries concerning it.

The Guam Times Weekly for May 15, and the Micronesia Times for May 13 (the latter being a new private newspaper, published weekly in Saipan) both carry stories which indicate the following:

- (a) A measles epidemic began in the Marianas and Palau in January, where 55 persons and 219 persons, respectively, were stricken.
- (b) There were 407 cases of measles in Truk in March.
- (c) An additional 852 cases occurred in Truk in April.
- (d) Medical personnel from elsewhere in the Trust Territory have been despatched to Truk, where patients are being cared for in schools and other public buildings. School teachers in Truk are giving voluntary aid.
- (e) The disease appears to be spreading to Pohnpei and the Marshalls.
- (f) Ten deaths have occurred, 6 in Truk and 4 in Palau. The deaths in Palau were all of children under four years of age.
- (g) Dr. Schneider, now the Acting Director of Medical Services for the Trust Territory, and a principal in the current Medical Revolt, is quoted as having said that the Yapese have largely escaped the disease because they earlier received immunisation as part of a National Institute of Health experiment; that immunisation elsewhere in the Trust Territory was not possible because the vaccine costs "between \$4.00 and \$5.00 per person, and the Trust Territory has only \$26.31 per person budgeted for all medical services".

This Office had no notice of the epidemic until the news articles mentioned above came to our attention late yesterday.

We are undertaking to obtain, by radiogram from the High Commissioner, confirmation, correction, and elaboration of the above statements. We are also inquiring of the High Commissioner and the Public Health Service whether immediate efforts to immunize all Trust Territory residents ought at this moment to be undertaken. We have established that a sizeable amount of Trust Territory grant money for this fiscal year remains unexpended. (We do not yet know to what extent it is unobligated.) If it is medically wise to undertake a massive immunization campaign forthwith, we shall see that it is done. If reprogramming of funds is necessary, and we suspect it is not, we will seek to achieve it forthwith.

We are also attempting to learn whether medical personnel in the Trust Territory have asked the High Commissioner for funds for measles immunization purposes. (Our budget request for fiscal year 1967 lists many diseases for which funds for immunization are sought, but there is no mention of measles. Measles vaccine has, of course, been available in the United States on a commercial basis for the last several years.) We are also attempting to learn the cost of measles vaccine. The \$4 to \$5 figure cited is probably exaggerated, though I regard this as entirely irrelevant.

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In addition, for some months we have sought from the Trust Territory Government information necessary to justify new appropriation ceiling legislation for the Trust Territory. By letter of May 12, I asked the High Commissioner to produce this information no later than May 25, the projected date of his arrival in Washington in connection with the meetings of the UN Trusteeship Council. I have no doubt that further funds are needed for Trust Territory purposes, particularly in the medical area. We will do what we can to obtain them as promptly as possible.

(Sgd.) Mrs. Ruth G. Van Cleve

Ruth G. Van Cleve

cc: Under Secretary Carver  
Deputy Assistant Secretary Vaughan

Van Cleve:emr  
5/19/65