HAVE YOU A RIGHT
to go to the marriage altar demanding
honor and purity in the girl you
marry, unless you are willing
to offer her
A Clean Life?

War Opens Up VD Discussion

by Ginalie Swaim

As the U.S. government geared up to fight the Hun, it also geared up to fight venereal disease. Starting in April 1917, the Wasserman blood test for syphilis was required of Iowans entering military service. The next year, two issues of the State Board of Health's Health Bulletin were devoted to VD, which, it reported, was on the rise in Des Moines and other Iowa cities. The bulletin spelled out what was expected. Health authorities must report all cases. Pharmacists selling VD drugs or compounds must make weekly reports of each customer's name, address, and sex to local health authorities. Those infected must restrict themselves from numerous kinds of contact. Blame was placed on prostitution. The bulletins made it clear that VD should not be considered a military problem but a civilian problem to be addressed in every Iowa community. In 1919, the State Board of Health received its first federal funds when the state passed a VD control act. Free clinics were set up in 12 cities. Educational materials directed to men and boys were placed in barbershops; small posters (see examples, this page) appeared in the Health Bulletin; an exhibit was set up at the state fair; and boys were reached via school lectures, film strips, pamphlets, and charts.

That same year, Jeannette Dean-Throckmorton joined the battle. Through a cooperative position with the United States Public Health Service, former physician Dean-Throckmorton became a State Board of Health lecturer. In three years, she delivered more than a thousand lectures on "social hygiene" to 185,000 women and girls—high school and college students, women's clubs, parent-teacher associations, and women in industry, business, and teaching.

Dean-Throckmorton's message was that VD "may attack [a mother] directly and ruin her health, wreck her happiness, rob her of the power to have children, or give her children that are blind, crippled or half-witted." Seldom had there been significant public discussion about syphilis, even though New York physician Prince Morrow had claimed in 1904 that one out of every seven marriages was childless because of VD.

Although Dean-Throckmorton maintained that sex education should also be taught in schools by trained teachers or motion pictures, mothers must stamp out children's vulgar and immoral thoughts and answer their questions frankly. "Women are the builders of the home and they naturally can touch upon sex matters with boys and girls with much better success than can men." "The majority of girls in this state receive no home instruction of any kind whatever on sex matters. It is doubtless the same with boys," she complained, determined to safeguard Iowa's youth during "the trying years of adolescence."