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U.S. Health Conference Under Way

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WASHINGTON—A White House conference on health, summoned by President Johnson to deal with what he has described as "the pressing health needs of this nation," is under way here.

Some 850 of America's leading health experts will spend the next two days discussing the various ways that health care in this country can be improved.

In the opening statement, the President stressed the urgency of the health problem. "Many citizens have been left behind in our advance toward better treatment and better health," he said.

Among goals he listed for a "new era of medicine," which he hopes this conference will help initiate, are:

- Increased life expectancy.
- Decreased infant mortality rate.
- Achievement of a healthier environment.
- Improved care for the mentally ill.
- Elimination of such diseases as tuberculosis, measles and whooping cough.

"I believe that this conference can give new strength and energy to our national effort to recruit health professionals, extend health services and improve treatment," he said.

Dr. George Beadle, Nobel prize geneticist and president of the University of Chicago is conference chairman. He told reporters he thought one reason he was selected is that he might be considered neutral in the controversial areas to be covered.

AMONG THE subjects scheduled is the need to improve health care for Negroes. In a paper being studied by a panel on health care Wednesday, Dr. Leonidas H. Berry complains about the inadequate hospital facilities that Negroes encounter in many cities.

Not only poor and unemployed Negroes but large numbers who are gainfully employed are treated in big charity hospitals," said Dr. Berry, who is president of the National Medical Assn. and senior attending physician of Chicago's Michael Reese and Provident hospitals.

"These facilities consist of large, open rooms housing up to 50 or more inadequately screened beds in most instances . . . The patient receives overloaded intern and resident care for the most part and inadequate nursing coverage."

This condition arises, he said, because private hospitals will not accept them or because their private physicians are not on an acceptable private hospital staff.

Dr. Berry recommended "the vigorous use of federal legislation as an educative tool to speed up meaningful rather than token integration of all health services and personnel at all levels."

He also recommended construction of a new type of "intergroup hospital for all patients."

SOME PROVOCATIVE questions were asked by Surgeon Gen. William H. Stewart at Tuesday morning's opening session. The developments of the recent past have produced a medical culture, he said, that has been characterized as "islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity." He asked his audience whether this was a fair description.

He also wanted to know whether we have educational programs "that will prepare people to meet the needs of Appalachia, of Harlem, or even of Westchester County, New York."

How long, he asked, can the United States continue to support a position "as an importer of physicians and nurses?"

And, "what meaningful response can we devise, in terms of meeting human needs, to the challenge of specialization? Does the answer lie in further refinement of the principles of group practice or in the con-