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STATE OF NEW MEXICO

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SECRETARY FOR HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

ACCEPTANCE COMMENTS

SEDGWICK MEMORIAL MEDAL

AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION October 21, 1987

I am honored to be here tonight, attend another stimulating meeting of the APHA, and renew professional associations which are so important to our work and careers.

William Thompson Sedgwick (1855-1921) was professor of biology and public health at MIT for 38 years, and one of the founders of the School of Public Health of Harvard and MIT. He was a Sanitarian in the broadest and truest sense of the term, and his influence on the field of sanitary engineering and public health was tremendous. As the first teacher to teach a bacteriology course for engineers, he was providing them with principles that were previously learned in medical schools, and teaching in a manner that could not easily be forgotten.

In Memoriam, George Chandler Whipple wrote that, "Until then sanitary engineering had leaned for support on chemistry, and here was a new science coming to its aid. I have in my study the notes which I took of Professor Sedgwick's weekly lectures. They began as follows: "The sanitarian needs a proper working theory." Then he proceeded to develop the germ theory of disease as he had learned it from Pasteur and the European scientists who were laying the foundations of that science which has done so much for the health of the world. He showed how physicians and engineers had been

wrong, how they had groped in the dark, and how, by applying the recently discovered principles of biology, it was possible to give to sanitary engineering new life.

His teaching was far from being exact. Sedgwick did not have a mathematical mind. His lectures were never formally prepared and as he grew older they became less methodical. He cared for general principles more than for details. The opening sentence of his first lecture to engineers which I have already quoted shows what he wanted most to impress upon his students. "The sanitarian needs a proper working theory." But it was chiefly his personal magnetism and his inspiration which told on his students, and this never failed him.

The American Public Health Association also claimed Sedgwick's attention. He became a member in 1902 and its President in 1915.

He always held the view that the public health service was different from the medical service, that a man could be an efficient health executive without being a physician.

Sedgwick crystallized expression in his stimulating book, The Principles of Sanitary Science and Public Health, which appeared in 1901. By its lucidity and beauty of expression, the book not only was an authoritative source of information for students and public health officials, but became a classic in the literature of Sanitary Science.

Tonight, my imposter complex has reached its zenith. While a student at the University of Michigan School of Public Health in 1954, I first heard of Professor Sedgwick and chose to write a paper concerning him. Thirty-three years later, I have again reviewed his remarkable career and am now supremely honored. This honor and serving as President of APHA are the highlights of my professional career. I accept with deep humility, and as a practitioner representative of

thousands of state and local public health professionals practicing in the trenches of public health and usually unheralded. I have been:

Fortunate to work in such times and places which have provided opportunities for new ideas, new programs, new public health measures, and new organizations;

Fortunate to have my wife Nedra and my children so supportive of my career;

Fortunate to have the privilege of having had outstanding mentors and protégés;

Fortunate to have been deeply involved with the APHA and be taught, inspired and renewed through the best of professional associates.

Thank you!