

St. Jude Director Cites Poor

To the Commercial Appeal:

Congratulations on the excellent editorial concerning urban housing in your March 18 edition of The Commercial Appeal. In addition to the disastrous effects of poor housing which you mentioned, numerous specific child health problems result. During the three years of the MAP-South-St. Jude nutrition and health program we have found that next to malnutrition inadequate housing is the leading disease of South Memphis children.

We have made the following observations:

1. Infections of the throat and skin due to hemolytic streptococcus are epidemic in South Memphis throughout the year, but particularly in late winter and late summer. They affect at times up to 20 per cent of the children of a given block. These infections can lead to rheumatic fever and acute nephritis. They are largely due to crowded houses and lack of washing facilities.

2. Pneumonia and middle ear infections due to pneumococcus are epidemic in South Memphis throughout the year, but especially in the winter. They are due primarily to exposure to the elements—rain, snow, wind—and crowding in the inadequate, dilapidated dwellings.

3. Burns, many serious and some fatal, are common among the children, especially in the winter. They are due largely to unsafe and unapproved methods of heating.

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Housing's Toll On Children

ing, such as high open flames on gas stoves. Fire kills more children in South Memphis than leukemia, muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis combined.

I could go on further and tell you about the parasitic and bacterial diseases of the intestines resulting from inadequate and worn-out plumbing, of the babies covered with mosquito bites for lack of screens, of the infected lacerated feet due to the broken glass in the streets but I will spare you further details.

To give medical care for illnesses without correcting their causes is like running on a treadmill. To expand local child health care facilities without providing adequate food and shelter for all Memphis children is only to quicken our pace on the treadmill.

The economy-minded citizen should take heed. Providing medical care for all the children with streptococcal pyoderma, pneumococcal pneumonia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, burns, infected feet and infectious diarrhea resulting from bad housing is

costing the public millions of dollars each year in taxes, insurance premiums and contributions. Adequate housing is not only more humane but cheaper than medical care.

Again congratulations on your efforts to provide every Memphis child with adequate food and shelter.

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