Where There Is No Doctor
a village health care handbook

~ revised edition ~

by

david werner

with

Carol Thuman and Jane Maxwell

with drawings by David Werner
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by David Werner; with Carol Thuman and Jane Maxwell

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Contents

A list of what is discussed in each chapter

INTRODUCTION

NOTE ABOUT THIS NEW EDITION

WORDS TO THE VILLAGE HEALTH WORKER (Brown Pages) .............. w1

Health Needs and Human Needs w2
Many Thing Relate to Health Care w7
Take a Good Look at Your Community w8
Using Local Resources to Meet Needs w12
Deciding What to Do and Where to Begin w13
Trying a New Idea w15
A Balance Between People and Land w16
A Balance Between Prevention and Treatment w17
Sensible and Limited Use of Medicines w18
Finding Out What Progress Has Been Made w20
Teaching and Learning Together w21
Tools for Teaching w22
Making the Best Use of This Book w28

Chapter 1
HOME CURES AND POPULAR BELIEFS ........................................ 1

Home Cures That Help 1
Beliefs That Can Make People Well 2
Beliefs That Can Make People Sick 4
Witchcraft—Black Magic—and the Evil Eye 5
Questions and Answers 6
Sunken Fontanel or Soft Spot 9

Ways to Tell Whether a Home Remedy Works or Not 10
Medicinal Plants 12
Homemade Casts—for Broken Bones 14
Enemas, Laxatives, and Purges 15

Chapter 2
SICKNESSES THAT ARE OFTEN CONFUSED .............................. 17

What Causes Sickness? 17
Different Kinds of Sicknesses and Their Causes 18
Non-infectious Diseases 18
Infectious Diseases 19
Sicknesses That Are Hard to Tell Apart 20

Example of Local Names for Sicknesses 22
Misunderstanding Due to Confusion of Names 25
Confusion between Different Illnesses That Cause Fever 26

Chapter 3
HOW TO EXAMINE A SICK PERSON ........................................ 29

Questions 29
General Condition of Health 30
Temperature 30
How to Use a Thermometer 31
Breathing (Respiration) 32
Pulse (Heartbeat) 32

Eyes 33
Ears 34
Skin 34
The Belly (Abdomen) 35
Muscles and Nerves 37
Chapter 4
HOW TO TAKE CARE OF A SICK PERSON .................................................. 39
The Comfort of the Sick Person 39
Special Care for a Person Who Is Very Ill 40
Liquids 40
Food 41
Cleanliness and Changing Position in Bed 41
Watching for Changes 41
Signs of Dangerous Illness 42
When and How to Look for Medical Help 43
What to Tell the Health Worker 43
Patient Report 44

Chapter 5
HEALING WITHOUT MEDICINES ....................................................... 45
Healing with Water 46
When Water Is Better than Medicines 47

Chapter 6
RIGHT AND WRONG USE OF MODERN MEDICINES. ....................... 49
Guidelines for the Use of Medicine 49
The Most Dangerous Misuse of Medicine 50
When Should Medicine Not Be Taken? 54

Chapter 7
ANTIBIOTICS: WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO USE THEM ............... 55
Guidelines for the Use of Antibiotics 56
What to Do if an Antibiotic Does Not Seem to Help 57
Importance of Limited Use of Antibiotics 58

Chapter 8
HOW TO MEASURE AND GIVE MEDICINE ........................................ 59
Medicine in Liquid Form 61
How to Give Medicines to Small Children 62
How to Take Medicines 63
Dosage Instructions for Persons Who Cannot Read 63

Chapter 9
INSTRUCTIONS AND PRECAUTIONS FOR INJECTIONS. ................ 65
When to Inject and When Not To 65
Emergencies When It Is Important to Give Injections 66
Medicines Not to Inject 67
Risks and Precautions 68
Dangerous Reactions From Injecting Certain Medicines 70
Avoiding Serious Reactions to Penicillin 71
How to Prepare a Syringe for Injection 72
How to Inject 73
How Injections Can Disable Children 74
How to Sterilize Equipment 74
Chapter 10

FIRST AID ................................................. 75

- Basic Cleanliness and Protection 75
- Fever 75
- Shock 77
- Loss of Consciousness 78
- When Something Gets Stuck in the Throat 79
- Drowning 79
- When Breathing Stops: Mouth-to-Mouth Breathing 80
- Emergencies Caused by Heat 81
- How to Control Bleeding from a Wound 82
- How to Stop Nosebleeds 83
- Cuts, Scrapes, and Small Wounds 84
- Large Cuts: How to Close Them 85
- Bandages 87
- Infected Wounds 88
- Bullet, Knife, and Other Serious Wounds 90
- Emergency Problems of the Gut
  - (Acute Abdomen) 93
- Appendicitis, Peritonitis 94
- Burns 96
- Broken Bones (Fractures) 98
- How to Move a Badly Injured Person 100
- Dislocations
  - (Bones Out of Place at a Joint) 101
- Strains and Sprains 102
- Poisoning 103
- Snakebite 104
- Other Poisonous Bites and Stings 106

Chapter 11

NUTRITION: WHAT TO EAT TO BE HEALTHY ......................... 107

- Sicknesses Caused by Not Eating Well 107
- Why It Is Important to Eat Right 109
- Preventing Malnutrition 109
- Main Foods and Helper Foods 110
- Eating Right to Stay Healthy 111
- How to Recognize Malnutrition 112
- Eating Better When You Do Not Have Much Money or Land 115
- Where to Get Vitamins: In Pills or in Foods? 118
- Things to Avoid in Our Diet 119
- The Best Diet for Small Children 120
- Harmful Ideas about Diet 123
- Special Diets for Specific Health Problems 124
  - Anemia 124
  - Rickets 125
  - High Blood Pressure 125
  - People Who Are Too Heavy 126
  - Constipation 126
  - Diabetes 127
  - Acid Indigestion, Heartburn, and Stomach Ulcers 128
  - Goiter
    - (A Swelling or Lump on the Throat) 130

Chapter 12

PREVENTION: HOW TO AVOID MANY SICKNESSES .......................... 131

- Cleanliness—and Problems from Lack of Cleanliness 131
- Basic Guidelines of Cleanliness 133
- Sanitation and Latrines 137
- Worms and Other Intestinal Parasites 140
  - Roundworm (Ascaris) 140
  - Pinworm (Threadworm, Enterobius) 141
  - Whipworm (Trichuris) 142
  - Hookworm 142
  - Tapeworm 143
- Trichinosis 144
- Amebas 144
- Giardia 145
- Blood Flukes
  - (Schistosomiasis, Bilharzia) 146
- Vaccinations (Immunizations)—Simple, Sure Protection 147
- Other Ways to Prevent Sickness and Injury 148
- Habits That Affect Health 148
### Chapter 13
**SOME VERY COMMON SICKNESSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dehydration</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhea and Dysentery</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Care of a Person with Acute Diarrhea</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches and Migraines</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colds and the Flu</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuffy and Runny Noses</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinus Trouble (Sinusitis)</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hay Fever (Allergic Rhinitis)</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allergic Reactions</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronchitis</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pneumonia</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthritis (Painful, Inflamed Joints)</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Pain</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varicose Veins</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piles (Hemorrhoids)</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swelling of the Feet and Other Parts of the Body</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hernia (Rupture)</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seizures (fits, convulsions)</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 14
**SERIOUS ILLNESSES THAT NEED SPECIAL MEDICAL ATTENTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuberculosis (TB, Consumption)</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabies</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetanus (Lockjaw)</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meningitis</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaria and Mosquito-borne Illnesses</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dengue, Zika, Chikungunya, Yellow Fever</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brucellosis (Undulant Fever, Malta Fever)</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typhoid Fever</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typhus</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 15
**SKIN PROBLEMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Rules for Treating Skin Problems</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions for Using Hot Compresses</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Skin Problems</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scabies</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lice</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedbugs</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticks and Chiggers</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Sores with Pus</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impetigo</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boils and Abscesses</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itching Rash, Welts, or Hives</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things That Cause Itching or Burning of the Skin</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shingles (Herpes Zoster)</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringworm, Tinea (Fungus Infections)</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Spots on the Face and Body</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mask of Pregnancy</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pellagra and Other Skin Problems Due to Malnutrition</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warts (Verrucae)</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corns</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pimples and Blackheads (Acne)</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer of the Skin</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuberculosis of the Skin or Lymph Nodes</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erysipelas and Cellulitis</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangrene (Gas Gangrene)</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulcers of the Skin Caused by Poor Circulation</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed Sores</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin Problems of Babies</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eczema (Red Patches with Little Blisters)</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psoriasis</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 16

THE EYES ................................................................. 217

Danger Signs 217
Injuries to the Eye 218
How to Remove a Speck of Dirt from the Eye 218
Chemical Burns of the Eye 219
Red, Painful Eyes—Different Causes 219
‘Pink Eye’ (Conjunctivitis) 219
Trachoma 220
Infected Eyes in Newborn Babies
  (Neonatal Conjunctivitis) 221
Iritis (Inflammation of the Iris) 221
Glaucoma 222
Infection of the Tear Sac
  (Dacryocystitis) 223

Trouble Seeing Clearly 223
Cross-Eyes and Wandering Eyes 223
Sty (Hordeolum) 224
Pterygium 224
A Scrape, Ulcer, or Scar on the Cornea 224
Bleeding in the White of the Eye 225
Bleeding Behind the Cornea (Hyphema) 225
Pus Behind the Cornea (Hypopyon) 225
Cataract 225
Night Blindness and Xerophthalmia 226
Spots or ‘Floaters’ Before the Eyes 227
Double Vision 227
River Blindness (Onchocerciasis) 227

Chapter 17

THE TEETH, GUMS, AND MOUTH ........................................ 229

Care of Teeth and Gums 229
If You Do Not Have a Toothbrush 230
Toothaches and Abscesses 231
Pyorrhea, a Disease of the Gums 231

Sores or Cracks at the Corners of the Mouth 232
White Patches or Spots in the Mouth 232
Cold Sores and Fever Blisters 232

Chapter 18

THE URINARY SYSTEM AND THE GENITALS .......................... 233

Urinary Tract Infections 234
Kidney or Bladder Stones 235
Enlarged Prostate Gland 235
Diseases Spread by Sexual Contact
  (Sexually Transmitted Infections) 236
Gonorrhea (Clap, VD, the Drip) and Chlamydia 236
Syphilis 237
Bubos: Bursting Lymph Nodes in the Groin 238

Use of a Catheter to Drain Urine 239
Problems of Women 241
Vaginal Discharge 241
How a Woman Can Avoid Many Infections 242
Pain or Discomfort in a Woman’s Belly 243
Men and Women Who Cannot Have Children (Infertility) 244

Chapter 19

INFORMATION FOR MOTHERS AND MIDWIVES ..................... 245

The Menstrual Period
  (Monthly Bleeding in Women) 245
The Menopause
  (When Women Stop Having Periods) 246
Pregnancy 247

How to Stay Healthy during Pregnancy 247
Minor Problems during Pregnancy 248
Danger Signs in Pregnancy 249
Check-ups during Pregnancy
  (Prenatal Care) 250
Record of Prenatal Care 253
Difficult Births 267
Things to Have Ready before the Birth 254
Tearing of the Birth Opening 269
Preparing for Birth 256
Care of the Newborn Baby 270
Signs That Show Labor Is Near 258
Illnesses of the Newborn 272
The Stages of Labor 259
The Mothers Health after Childbirth 276
Care of the Cut Cord (Navel) 263
Childbirth Fever
The Delivery of the Placenta (Afterbirth) 264
(Infection after Giving Birth) 276
Hemorrhaging (Heavy Bleeding) 264
Lumps or Growths in the Lower Part
Medicines to Control Bleeding
of the Belly 280
After Birth or Miscarriage:
Oxytocin, Misoprostol, Ergometrine 266
Miscarriage (Spontaneous Abortion) 281
High Risk Mothers and Babies 282

Chapter 20
FAMILY PLANNING—HAVING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN YOU WANT .................................................. 283

Family Planning 284
Other Methods of Family Planning 290
How Women Become Pregnant 286
Natural Methods of Family Planning 291
Family Planning Methods 287
These Methods Do Not Prevent Pregnancy 293
Condoms 287
Methods for Those Who Never Want to
Birth Control Pills (Oral Contraceptives) 288
Have More Children 294

Chapter 21
HEALTH AND SICKNESSES OF CHILDREN ............................................................. 295

What to Do to Protect Children’s
Health 295
Whooping Cough 313
Children’s Growth—
Infantile Paralysis (Polio) 314
and the ‘Road to Health’ 297
How to Make Simple Crutches 315
Review of Children’s Health Problems
Dislocated Hip 316
Discussed in Other Chapters 305
Umbilical Hernia
Problems Children Are Born With 316
(Belly Button that Sticks Out) 317
A ‘Swollen Testicle’
(Hydrocele or Hernia) 317
Mentally Slow, Deaf, or Deformed
(Dislocated Hip) 317
Children 318
The Spastic Child (Cerebral Palsy) 320
Slow Development in the
First Months of Life 321
Infectious Diseases of Childhood 311
Sickle Cell Disease 321
Chickenpox 311
Helping Children Learn 322
Measles (Rubeola) 311
German Measles (Rubella) 312
Measles (Rubeola) 311
Sore Throat and Inflamed Tonsils 309
Mumps 312
Rheumatic Fever 310
Earache and Ear Infections 309
Infectious Diseases of Childhood 311
Sore Throat and Inflamed Tonsils 309
Chickenpox 311
Umbilical Hernia
Measles (Rubeola) 311
A ‘Swollen Testicle’
(German Measles (Rubella) 312)
(Mentally Slow, Deaf, or Deformed
(Sickel Cell Disease 321
(Hydrocele or Hernia) 317
Children 318
(Slow Development in the
(First Months of Life 321
(Chickenpox 311
(Sickel Cell Disease 321
(Helping Children Learn 322

Chapter 22
HEALTH AND SICKNESSES OF OLDER PEOPLE ......................................................... 323
Summary of Health Problems Discussed in Other Chapters 323
Other Important Illnesses of Old Age 325
Heart Trouble 325
Words to Younger Persons Who Want to Stay Healthy When Older 326
Stroke (Apoplexy, Cerebro-Vascular Accident, CVA) 327

Deafness 327
Loss of Sleep (Insomnia) 328
Diseases Found More Often in People over Forty 328
Cirrhosis of the Liver 328
Gallbladder Problems 329
Accepting Death 330

Chapter 23
THE MEDICINE KIT ................................................................................................. 331
How to Care for Your Medicine Kit 332
Buying Supplies for the Medicine Kit 333
The Home Medicine Kit 334
The Village Medicine Kit 336
Words to the Village Storekeeper (or Pharmacist) 338

THE GREEN PAGES—The Uses, Dosage, and Precautions for Medicines .......... 339
List of Medicines in the Green Pages 341
Index of Medicines in the Green Pages 344
Information on Medicines 350

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION .................................................................................. 399
HIV and AIDS 399
Sores on the Genitals 402
Circumcision and Excision 404
Special Care for Small, Early, and Underweight Babies 405
Ear Wax 405
Leishmaniasis 406
Guinea Worm 406
Emergencies Caused by Cold 408
How to Measure Blood Pressure 410
Poisoning from Pesticides 412
Complications from Abortion 414
Drug Abuse and Addiction 416

VOCABULARY—Explaining Difficult Words ...................................................... 419

ADDRESSES FOR TEACHING MATERIALS ......................................................... 429

INDEX (Yellow Pages) ......................................................................................... 433

Dosage Instructions for Persons Who Cannot Read
Patient Reports
Other Books from Hesperian
Information About Vital Signs
This handbook has been written primarily for those who live far from medical centers, in places where there is no doctor. But even where there are doctors, people can and should take the lead in their own health care. So this book is for everyone who cares. It has been written in the belief that:

1. Health care is not only everyone’s right, but everyone’s responsibility.

2. Informed self-care should be the main goal of any health program or activity.

3. Ordinary people provided with clear, simple information can prevent and treat most common health problems in their own homes—earlier, cheaper, and often better than can doctors.

4. Medical knowledge should not be the guarded secret of a select few, but should be freely shared by everyone.

5. People with little formal education can be trusted as much as those with a lot. And they are just as smart.

6. Basic health care should not be delivered, but encouraged.

Clearly, a part of informed self-care is knowing one’s own limits. Therefore guidelines are included not only for what to do, but for when to seek help. The book points out those cases when it is important to see or get advice from a health worker or doctor. But because doctors or health workers are not always nearby, the book also suggests what to do in the meantime—even for very serious problems.

This book has been written in fairly basic English, so that persons without much formal education (or whose first language is not English) can understand it. The language used is simple but, I hope, not childish. A few more difficult words have been used where they are appropriate or fit well. Usually they are used in ways that their meanings can be easily guessed. This way, those who read this book have a chance to increase their language skills as well as their medical skills.

Important words the reader may not understand are explained in a word list or vocabulary at the end of the book. The first time a word listed in the vocabulary is mentioned in a chapter it is usually written in italics.

Where There Is No Doctor was first written in Spanish for farm people in the mountains of Mexico where, years ago, the author helped form a health care network now run by the villagers themselves. Where There Is No Doctor has been translated into more than 80 languages and is used by village health workers in over 100 countries.
The first English edition was the result of many requests to adapt it for use in Africa and Asia. I received help and suggestions from persons with experience in many parts of the world. But the English edition seems to have lost much of the flavor and usefulness of the original Spanish edition, which was written for a specific area, and for people who have for years been my neighbors and friends. In rewriting the book to serve people in many parts of the world, it has in some ways become too general.

To be fully useful, this book should be adapted by persons familiar with the health needs, customs, special ways of healing, and local language of specific areas.

Persons or programs who wish to use this book, or portions of it, in preparing their own manuals and activities for villagers or health workers are encouraged to do so. We often grant permission at no charge, provided the parts reproduced are distributed free or at cost—not for profit. Please see the explanation online at www.hesperian.org/about/open-copyright, or contact us at permissions@hesperian.org to answer any questions. Our goal is to help you design a program that works for you, not to make money.

For local or regional health programs that do not have the resources for revising this book or preparing their own manuals, it is strongly suggested that if the present edition is used, leaflets or inserts be supplied with the book to provide additional information as needed.

In the Green Pages (the Uses, Dosage, and Precautions for Medicines) blank spaces have been left to write in common brand names and prices of medicines. Once again, local programs or organizations distributing the book would do well to make up a list of generic or low-cost brand names and prices, to be included with each copy of the book.

This book was written for anyone who wants to do something about his or her own and other people's health. However, it has been widely used as a training and work manual for community health workers. For this reason, an introductory section has been added for the health worker, making clear that the health worker's first job is to share her knowledge and help educate people.

Today in over-developed as well as under-developed countries, existing health care systems are in a state of crisis. Often, human needs are not being well met. There is too little fairness. Too much is in the hands of too few.

Let us hope that through a more generous sharing of knowledge, and through learning to use what is best in both traditional and modern ways of healing, people everywhere will develop a kinder, more sensible approach to caring—for their own health, and for each other.

—D.W.
Note about this New Edition

In this revised edition of Where There is No Doctor, we have added new information and updated old information, based on the latest scientific knowledge. Health care specialists from many parts of the world have generously given advice and suggestions.

When it would fit without having to change page numbers, we have added new information to the main part of the book. (This way, the numbering stays the same, so that page references in our other books, such as Helping Health Workers Learn, will still be correct.)

The Additional Information section at the end of the book (p. 399) has information about health problems of growing or special concern: HIV and AIDS, sores on the genitals, leishmaniasis, complications from abortion, guinea worm, and others. Here also are topics such as measuring blood pressure, misuse of pesticides, drug addiction, and a method of caring for early and underweight babies.

New ideas and information can be found throughout the book—medical knowledge is always changing! For example:

- **Nutrition** advice has changed. Experts used to tell mothers to give children more foods rich in proteins. But it is now known that what most poorly nourished children need is more energy-rich foods. Many low-cost energy foods, especially grains, provide enough protein *if the child eats enough of them*. Finding ways to give enough energy foods is now emphasized, instead of the ‘four food groups’. (See Chapter 11.)

- Advice for treatment of **stomach ulcer** is different nowadays. For years doctors recommended drinking lots of milk. But according to recent studies, it is better to drink lots of water, not milk. (See p. 129.)

- Knowledge about **special drinks for diarrhea** (oral rehydration therapy) has also changed. Not long ago experts thought that drinks made with sugar were best. But we now know that drinks made with cereals do more to prevent water loss, slow down diarrhea, and combat malnutrition than do sugar-based drinks or “ORS” packets. (See p. 152.)

- A section has been added on **sterilizing equipment**. This is important to prevent the spread of certain diseases, such as HIV. (See p. 74.)

- We have also added sections on **mosquito-borne illnesses** (p. 187), **sickle cell disease** (p. 321), **contraceptive implants** (p. 290), and using **birth control pills for emergency contraception** (p. 395).

- Page 105 contains revised information about **treatment of snakebite**.

- See page 139 for details on building the fly-killing VIP latrine.
The Green Pages now include additional medicines, including anti-retrovirals for treating HIV. Some diseases have become resistant to the medicines used in the past, so it is now harder to give simple medical advice for certain diseases—especially malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, and sexually spread infections. Often we give several possibilities for treatment. **For many infectious diseases you will need local advice about which medicines are available and effective in your area.**

In updating the information on medicines, we mostly include only those on the World Health Organization’s [List of Essential Drugs](#). (However we also discuss some widely used but dangerous medicines to give warnings and to discourage their use—see also pages 50 to 53.) In trying to cover health needs and variations in many parts of the world, we have listed more medicines than will be needed for any one area. To persons preparing adaptations of this book, we strongly suggest that the Green Pages be shortened and modified to meet the specific needs and treatment patterns in your country.

In this new edition of *Where There Is No Doctor* we continue to stress the value of traditional forms of healing, and have added some more “home remedies.” However, since many folk remedies depend on local plants and customs, we have added only a few which use commonly found items such as garlic. We hope those adapting this book will add home remedies useful to their area.

**Community action** is emphasized throughout this book. For example, today it is often not enough to explain to mothers that ‘breast is best’. Communities must organize to make sure that mothers are able to breastfeed their babies at work. Likewise, problems such as misuse of pesticides (p. 412), drug abuse (p. 416), and unsafe abortions (p. 414) are best solved by people working together to make their communities safer, healthier, and more fair.

"Health for all” can be achieved only through the organized demand by people for greater equality in terms of land, wages, services, and basic rights.

More power to the people!