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THE MARCH OF DIMES

The August 2001 Images of Health article, “. . . So That Others May Walk’: The March of Dimes,”¹ is fascinating. The March of Dimes is an excellent example of institutional adaptation in the face of structural change. Vaccination greatly reduced the incidence of poliomyelitis in the 1950s and eventually led to the elimination, in 1991, of polio virus from the Americas. In response to this situation, the anti-polio foundation had 3 options: to declare its mission fulfilled and close its doors, to focus on combating polio overseas, or to change its mission. The foundation chose the third path, and it is now officially the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation.

The poster that is depicted appears to be more recent than the text’s topic of the founding of the March of Dimes in the 1930s. The nurse in the background has the words “polio vaccine volunteer” on her sleeve. Thus the

“Help me, too” would seem to refer to those children who missed out on vaccination and contracted polio. The poster could be from an anti-complacency campaign conducted in the 1950s. After widespread vaccination was introduced in 1955, the public, and especially new parents, began to believe that the advent of vaccination meant that polio was vanquished. As the history of the March of Dimes attests, this period was the beginning of a major institutional adaptation. ■

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1. Helfand WH, Lazarus J, Theerman P. “. . . So That Others May Walk’: the March of Dimes. *Am J Public Health.* 2001;91:1190.