

We Average One Illness a Year

Public Health

On an average, each person in the country has at least one disabling illness every year, the Committee on the Cost of Medical Care has reported after a survey of various sickness reports compiled by the U. S. Public Health Service and other organizations.

Men have a disabling sickness about once a year, women about twice and children over twice during the school year. Colds, bronchitis, grippe, influenza and pneumonia are oftenest the cause of these disabling illnesses and cause the longest disability. On the same basis of the number of cases and total time lost digestive disorders and diseases also take a high place.

About 130,000,000 cases of disabling illness occur in the United States each year. Adding non-disabling illnesses more than doubles the figure, the committee reported. The 36,000,000

wage-earners in the country lose at least 250,000,000 workdays per year, and the 24,000,000 school children lose 170,000,000 school days per year. These figures account for only one-half of the total population.

"Authorities have stated that there are at all times approximately 700,000 persons with tuberculosis, 10,000 with pernicious anemia and 110,000 addicted to narcotic drugs," the report said. "In any one year there are in the United States over one million cases of malaria. Syphilis and gonorrhoea at any one time appear to be causing nearly one person per 100 to place himself under the care of a physician. Over 36,000 cases of smallpox were reported in a recent year. While childbearing is not a disease, it does cause a large amount of disability. In 1928 there were nearly 2,000,000 births in the registration

area, many of them followed by complications and a considerable number (a larger proportion than in most civilized countries) by death.

"Hospitals for mental and nervous diseases contain over 350,000 patients, and this figure is far below what the total would be if those not hospitalized were included. Of the children now attending school and college, 'over 960,000 will enter a hospital for mental disease at some period in their lives if present rates for first admissions continue.' These figures include only the more serious mental diseases and take no account of the large numbers with lesser mental disturbances.

"Hospitals other than those for nervous and mental diseases contain, on the average, over 350,000 patients at all times. The total in all hospitals on a single day is about 700,000."

Science News-Letter, November 23, 1929

Test Radioactivity

Medicine

With a market flooded with waters, salves, hair tonics, tissue creams, mouth washes, heating pads and other preparations alleged to have great healing power because of their radioactivity, government chemists are working on suitable means of detecting the presence or absence of radioactive substances in water and drugs.

At the meeting of the Association of Official Agricultural Chemists, J. W. Sale of the U. S. Department of Agriculture reported on one method of testing radioactivity. He recommended further checking of the method by chemists, before official adoption by the association.

The discovery of the curative properties of radioactive substances has resulted, among other things, in the production of solid, semi-solid and liquid preparations which are being sold as possessing sufficient radioactivity to cure all kinds of conditions. A recent government survey of such waters and drugs revealed that their medicinal efficacy was much misrepresented. Action will be taken against shipments of the alleged radioactive products which are falsely or fraudulently misbranded.

Radium and radioactive substances have possibilities of great harm as well as great good, it is declared. Using them indiscriminately without adequate supervision is extremely dangerous.

Science News-Letter, November 23, 1929

Treatment for Colds Should Vary

Medicine

Because colds are not unchanging but have three distinct stages, treatment must be planned for each stage, Dr. Walter A. Wells, professor of otolaryngology at Georgetown University, has advised. Treatment by a physician will do much to relieve the discomfort and shorten the duration of a cold, but not everyone can have medical treatment for all colds. Remedies to apply at home are described by Dr. Wells in his recently published book.

In the first and second stages treatment should be general, not local, so as not to irritate further the tender membranes of the nose. Dr. Wells describes the first stage as the one when there is stuffiness, chilliness and possible fever and general discomfort. In the second stage there is marked secretion of watery acrid material. This changes to a mucous or mucopurulent discharge during the last stage.

Prevention is the best of all home remedies for a cold, Dr. Wells stated, but having once got a cold, the wise thing is to remain indoors in a comfortable, warm room, resting in bed for a day or so if possible. Cold baths, cold showers and strenuous exercise, valuable hardening methods in the intervals between colds, should be stopped while one has a cold.

"Nothing could be farther from the right than the injunction, 'Feed a

cold and starve a fever,'" Dr. Wells explained. "A cold is a fever, the inflammation being localized in the respiratory mucous membranes. Overloading the stomach is directly harmful, and meats, gravies, fried stuff and richly spiced food are especially to be avoided."

Plenty of fluids, including milk and fruit juices, are advisable. For the beginning stage of a cold, free perspiration helps and for this hot drinks may be taken.

During the acute, feverish stage of a cold, the blood tends to be less alkaline than usual. To combat this, alkaline treatment, such as taking bicarbonate of soda in water, is advised. Gentle local treatment may be begun in the second stage. Steam inhalations of menthol or menthol and eucalyptus are healing and soothing. For the last stage of a cold, alkaline antiseptic solutions used locally as a douche are in order.

The chlorine treatment of colds Dr. Wells and his associates found was frequently helpful in simple uncomplicated cases when used in the first stage. When tonsils or sinuses were involved this treatment had little effect. Dr. Wells has found no scientific foundation for the now popular vaccine treatment of colds, and attributed the occasional good results from it to coincidence.

Science News-Letter, November 23, 1929