

INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE

# Tuberculosis Most Important Disease Problem in Industry

## Preventing Illness and Injury Industrial Physician's Chief Job; Most Occupational Diseases Preventable

**T**UBERCULOSIS is the most important disease problem in all industry, from the standpoint of both workers and employers. This assessment of the tuberculosis problem was made by Dr. B. L. Vosburgh of the General Electric Company, Schenectady, N. Y., at the meeting of the American Association of Industrial Physicians and Surgeons.

In spite of enormous strides made in the control of tuberculosis it is still a serious disease, Dr. Vosburgh explained, because it continues to take a heavy toll particularly in the age groups from 20 to 40 when man's productivity is at its peak.

"From both an economic and a public health standpoint it outranks every other contagious disease with the possible exception of syphilis," he said.

The bright side of the picture appeared when Dr. Vosburgh told how the worker who has contracted tuberculosis can be protected from the most disastrous effects of the disease and can be kept in good enough health to go on working at his job.

### Watch for It

The important thing is to discover the disease before it has progressed far enough to do irreparable damage. For this Dr. Vosburgh recommended regular examinations and supervision of all industrial workers. By such methods many cases of tuberculosis will be discovered even when the patient does not know he is sick. These are the cases in which the disease may have partially healed spontaneously, but there is always danger of its breaking out in severe form if the worker becomes over-tired or works in a dusty atmosphere.

Illustrating this point, Dr. Vosburgh reported the case of a young millwright who pulled with all his might on a rope and then began to have bloody sputum. After five years of compensation, he died at the age of 44. This man had been working with a partially healed tuberculosis for years, Dr. Vosburgh said.

For both the worker whose tuberculosis has healed spontaneously, as discovered by examination, and the worker

who has been discharged from a sanatorium with an arrested case of tuberculosis, the paramount thing is to find the proper job. The job that will be easiest is the one such a worker should have. Usually this means the job the man knows most about.

The worker with arrested tb should not be put back at his own job, however, when the work itself was a factor in lighting up the disease in the first place, or when the work is of a kind to strain or tire the worker, or if it is a dusty job.

### Keeps Workers Healthy

Preventing illness and injury among the workers is now the chief job of the industrial physician, Dr. C. D. Shelby, medical consultant for the General Motors Corporation, Detroit, declared.

It is a far cry from the old days when the plant doctor's chief and only job was to give first aid and emergency treatment of injuries incurred by the workers. Now he goes out into the plant with the engineers and looks for conditions which might cause injury or sickness, so that these conditions may be changed and the injuries and illnesses prevented.

Another important function of the industrial physician as described by Dr. Shelby is the examination of applicants for employment and recommendation for their placement at work of a type for which they are best suited from a health standpoint. The workers employed should be examined regularly and often, to discover the first signs of disease, whether connected with the job or not. Except in emergencies or accidents, the modern plant doctor does not treat the employes, but watches over their health, referring them to their own physicians for whatever medical treatment they may need.

### Engineer Prevents Illness

Most cases of industrial or occupational diseases can be prevented by the engineer, Reuel C. Stratton, supervising chemical engineer for the Travelers Insurance Company, Hartford, Conn., declared.

Diseases caused by dust, such as

silicosis, should not take all the engineer's attention, Mr. Stratton warned. At present, safety engineers and industrial hygienists are concentrating upon these dusty diseases, but Mr. Stratton cautioned the engineer against letting attention to these diseases keep him from noticing and preventing other health hazards in industry.

This job of prevention which Mr. Stratton put up to the engineers, however, is enormous and most confusing and perplexing. As an aid in attacking the job, Mr. Stratton suggested a three-point program.

First the engineer should make an inventory of occupational diseases that may occur in his plant. For this and for many other features of his job he needs the cooperation and aid of the plant physician.

Second point is to draw up a plan for correction of the exposure shown by the inventory.

Third point is to make a concentrated attack on the major exposures first, following through until all are eliminated.

An important feature of industrial hazards is the length of time the worker is exposed to the particular hazard. For assessing this factor, and for determining which workers are least susceptible to injury from a particular process, the engineer needs the aid of the physician.

Constant introduction of new materials and methods in industry makes the engineer's problem more difficult. Often he cannot find any previous knowledge of possible health hazards in the new substances. Laboratory work to determine the effects of new chemicals on the human body is proceeding, but slowly, Mr. Stratton said.

*Science News Letter, October 17, 1936*

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