

PUBLIC HEALTH—PSYCHIATRY

# Neuropsychiatric Institute Proposed By Surgeon General

## Modeled After National Cancer Institute, New Staff Would Attack Problem of Mental and Nervous Diseases

**M**ENTAL and nervous diseases which doom their victims to a life from which death is a welcome release are scheduled for attack on a nationwide scale by the plans of the nation's leader in the fight for health, Surgeon General Thomas Parran of the U. S. Public Health Service.

Spearhead of the attack would be the National Neuropsychiatric Institute which Surgeon General Parran proposed in his annual report transmitted to Congress.

This Neuropsychiatric Institute would be modeled after the National Cancer Institute, where a staff of trained scientists are now searching for knowledge leading to methods of controlling cancer.

Mental and nervous diseases and epilepsy together represent the largest unsolved problem in medicine, Surgeon General Parran stated in his report recommending that the nation build a National Neuropsychiatric Institute.

Hospitals caring for mental disease have on their books more than 500,000 patients and more than 117,000 additional patients are in hospitals for mental defectives and epileptics. The aging of our population will tremendously increase the total number of sufferers from mental disease.

"By 1980 it is predicted that we shall have one-half the people under 19 years of age we now have, and twice as many over the age of 65," Surgeon General Parran pointed out.

### Prevention Urged

"The incidence of mental disease in the age group over 65 years is 10 times what it is in the group of 19 years and under. A little mathematics will show how much more mental disease we shall have then than now. We must start now," he declared, "to work out methods for preventing mental disease to help avoid such a load in the future.

"Recent developments showing the influence of certain vitamins, such as nicotinic acid, in relieving cases of insanity not heretofore recognized as being of dietary origin open many possibilities for

further research not only of accessory food factors but of other phases of body metabolism, such as hormones.

"The impression is growing among psychiatrists that constitutional and metabolic factors may play a role in forms of insanity heretofore thought of as being of psychic origin," he continued.

The effects of insulin shock treatment now used in one form of mental disease, schizophrenia, which are like "taking the veil from the patient's eyes, transporting him from a vegetative state to an apparently normal one for a time," cause a great disturbance of body metabolism, he pointed out. All these factors indicate the need for physiological research on mental and nervous disorders.

The proposed Neuropsychiatric Institute would be built on the present site

of the New York Marine Hospital, giving the staff access to patients and to the library facilities of the metropolis, and the advantages of working under the "stimulating influence of extensive activities and informed personnel" in the nervous and mental disease field." The plans call for 350,000 cubic feet of laboratory space for fundamental research and access to 200 patients for clinical study. It is also suggested that the Institute should have funds to allot to competent groups throughout the country for research on the problem of nervous and mental disease and epilepsy, and that a national advisory council, similar to the National Advisory Cancer Council, should be established.

### Warmly Approved

The idea for the Neuropsychiatric Institute has been warmly approved by authorities in the field, it is stated. Although millions of dollars are being spent each year for the care and treatment of the mentally sick, very little is being spent for fundamental research which might lead to a measurable control of such sickness through discoveries pointing to effective measures of prevention and cure.

*Science News Letter, January 13, 1940*



### FOR HOUSEKEEPING

*In a workshop at the Pyramids of Giza, Haggi Ahmed Yusef of the Cairo Museum is shown restoring a beautiful box that Pharaoh Cheops' mother, Queen Hetep-heres, had for keeping curtains. Found in almost hopeless chaos in her secret tomb at Giza, the faience inlay on gold has been patiently reset on a new box of proper size. A replica of this 5,000-year-old piece of furniture has been received by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which explored the queen's tomb in a joint expedition with Harvard University.*