

MEDICINE

Cancer Aid from Amazon?

Super-secret head-shrinking solution may be able to shrink cells that have begun to grow wildly back to normal, scientist suggests.

► **HEADHUNTERS** may be bad medicine for their victims but the chemical solution they use for shrinking heads may be good medicine for cancer patients, it was suggested by Dr. Wilburn H. Ferguson, an American-born physician here on a one-man medical mission for Ecuador.

Cancer is a pathological condition in which the cellular tissue throws off all restraints of growth and multiplies haphazardly. Nothing so far has been found to shrink the cells back to normal once they begin their wild growth. Dr. Ferguson believes that experiments with the super-secret chemical solution used by some Jivaro tribes for head-shrinking may open up a new approach to cancer.

He may be the first white man ever to have obtained this material, which is a closely guarded secret among the Jivaro chiefs. At a conference held at the Ecuadorian Embassy, he stated that it took him 17 years before he finally found a Brujo, or chief, who would part with a small jarful of it. He is willing to turn it over to competent medical authorities for experimentation, having been promised by the Brujo that a large enough supply would be furnished.

American authorities on ethnology in Washington, who have made expeditions to headhunting areas, stated that they were not aware that any super-secret solution was used. The headhunters they came in contact with boiled the heads in water and used the juice from the chinchipe vine for its astringent effect.

However, there are over a hundred tribes in the Amazon basin, each using a different type of solution. Dr. Ferguson was impressed with this process because it not only shrinks normal skin tissue to miniature size but also the cartilaginous tissue in the nose and ear. European pathologists

believe that this cannot be done, Dr. Ferguson said.

In all, Dr. Ferguson has brought back some 24 crude drugs used by the Jivaros to treat many conditions. He hopes to interest doctors and researchers in this country in them. He has donated specimens of them to the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The medical art of the Jivaros has already contributed much to modern medicine. Five widely known drugs, originally used by these people, are quinine, cocaine, caffeine, cascara sagrada (laxative) and curare, in addition to rotenone which is used as an insecticide.

Some of the drugs brought back by Dr. Ferguson that have never been analyzed or experimented with and their use by the natives, are: cana agria, used for jaundice; mano de sapo (frog hand), for intestinal colic and dysentery; raibarbudo, for heart failure and palpitation; copal, a disinfectant for open cuts, tropical ulcers and other sores; guga mama panga, for infections, fevers and other conditions following childbirth.

Dr. Ferguson is here on a mission to interest university medical schools in the establishment of an international teaching hospital for post-graduate students at Quito, Ecuador. He is director of anesthesia at the San Juan de Dios hospital there, which is one of the oldest hospitals on the American continent. It has been in continuous operation since 1565.

Science News Letter, October 23, 1948

GENERAL SCIENCE

Scientists Organize Group On Loyalty Clearance

► A "SCIENTISTS' Committee on Loyalty Problems" has been organized in Princeton, N. J., by the Federation of American Scientists.

The new group, which includes Albert Einstein and other well-known scientists, will not "defend" scientists under investigation, it was explained, but it will seek "full and fair hearings." Information and legal advice will be furnished by the committee to scientists with clearance problems.

A statement issued in connection with the announcement of the new committee charges that clearance procedures have "caused some grave and wholly unnecessary injustices to many scientists." This has made it difficult for government laboratories to hire scientists, the statement adds.

Attacked in the statement are:

1. "The doctrine of guilt by association," which, the statement contends, "seems to have been carried to absurd extremes."

2. Restrictions "of any sort" on scientists not doing classified work.

3. "Black-listing" of scientists who have been once refused loyalty clearance.

Listed as another type of loyalty problem is "the public defamation of one of America's leading physicists, Dr. Edward U. Condon, director of the National Bureau of Standards.

"Scientists should take the lead in combating this vicious type of character assassination and in ensuring full public understanding of the facts," the statement concludes.

Chairman of the new committee is Dr. William A. Higinbotham, Brookhaven National Laboratory scientist and former secretary of the Federation. A. S. Wightman of Princeton University will serve as secretary of the group, with D. R. Hamilton, also of Princeton, as treasurer.

In addition to Einstein, members include Dr. H. D. Smyth, Princeton physicist and author of the famous "Smyth Report" on atomic energy; Dr. S. A. Goudsmit, Brookhaven scientist who headed a postwar mission to investigate the scientific effort of the Nazis; Dr. Irving Wolff, director of radio tube research at the Radio Corporation of America laboratories; Dr. M. S. Livingston, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Dr. Stuart Mudd of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine; Dr. Oswald Veblen of the Institute for Advanced Study; L. P. Eisenhart, dean emeritus of the graduate school of Princeton University; Dr. Lyman Spitzer, Jr., director of the Princeton Observatory; and D. Bohm, Roy Britten and R. R. Bush, all Princeton University scientists.

Science News Letter, October 23, 1948

Freezer locker plants have multiplied eight times in the past ten years.

A new type of earthworm, thought to be from the orient, is stirring up trouble for New England golfers on putting greens; it brings to the surface a much larger amount of casts than ordinary earthworms do.

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