

MEDICINE

Fatal Diseases Stopped

Forgotten drug turning out to be cure for two deadly diseases caused by yeast-like fungi, blastomycosis and actinomycosis.

► A DRUG so disappointing its manufacturer never put it on the market is now turning out to be a "cure" for two highly fatal diseases caused by yeast-like fungi.

"Cure" may be too strong a word to use right now. But four patients have already been saved by it and doctors using it say it is "better than anything used before."

Name of the drug is stilbamidine. The diseases in which it is now giving good results are North American blastomycosis and actinomycosis, known also as "lumpy jaw" when it attacks cattle.

The first patient to get this new medicine for blastomycosis was a 33-year-old Indian. For about a year he had trouble swallowing. This got so bad that he could hardly take any food and lost about 40 pounds in five months. At the first hospital he went to it was thought he had cancer of the esophagus, or gullet. The diagnosis of blastomycosis was made, by finding the yeast-like fungi in material from his throat, after he had been transferred to the Veterans Administration Hospital at Fort Howard, near Baltimore.

Details of this case are reported to the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (Aug. 4) by Drs. Emanuel B. Schoenbach, Joseph H. Miller, Milton Ginsberg and Perrin H. Long, of Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Baltimore. Drs. Miller and Ginsberg are also on the surgical staff at the Fort Howard VA Hospital.

The first patient showed "marked improvement" and normal temperature in less than three weeks after stilbamidine and a related chemical, propamidine, were started. Three months after coming to the Fort Howard Hospital and after three courses of stilbamidine and propamidine the patient was well, had gained 37 pounds, had a good appetite and was no longer harboring the yeast-like fungi in his throat.

The "excellent" results in this and other cases lead the Baltimore doctors to advise giving the drugs "an extensive trial in the treatment of severe yeast-like infections."

Stilbamidine and related chemicals of the diamidine group were tried in 1939 as remedies for the tropical disease, kala-azar. Pentavalent antimony compounds were found to be much better, so the diamidines were temporarily shelved. Then in 1947 they were revived for treatment of multiple myeloma, a malignant bone marrow disease. Although first reports were promising, the chemicals again were found not very satisfactory.

Meanwhile in 1945 a Chicago scientist, W. O. Elson, reported that in the test tube some of these compounds had ability to stop the organism that causes blastomycosis. Dr. Schoenbach at Johns Hopkins later called attention to the treatment possibilities of this report. Discussion of this among the group at Johns Hopkins led to trial of the drugs in cases of blastomycosis and actinomycosis at the Veterans Hospital and at the U. S. Marine Hospital and University Hospital.

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BABY SARUS CRANE—What may be the first sarus crane ever to hatch in the United States pecked its way out of the shell at the Philadelphia Zoo over the week-end of July 21. Although his parents stand about six feet tall, the little chick measures only nine inches high.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Bumper Baby Crop Predicted for This Year

► A BUMPER CROP of babies is expected this year by statisticians of the U. S. Public Health Service.

The number born during the first five months of the year, more than 1,500,000, is 8.4% more than were born during the same period in 1950 and is near the all-time record of 1947. At the present rate, 1951 will set a new record.

The Korean War which started a marriage license upswing in June, 1950, is believed responsible. March saw the start of a marked upswing in births with increases of 13% and 14% in April and May over the same months last year.

On an annual basis, the birth rate for the first five months of 1951 was 23.9 per 1,000 population.

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