

MEDICINE

Over Million Lives Saved

In the first 15 years of widespread use of sulfa drugs and antibiotics, an era that opened in 1937, more than a million and a half lives were saved.

➤ ABOUT ONE and one-half million lives were saved in the first 15 years of the sulfa drug-antibiotic era, Dr. C. C. Dauer, medical adviser in the National Office of Vital Statistics, Public Health Service, told the Institute on Medical History held at the New York Academy of Medicine.

The lives saved represent those who might have died if death rates from certain infectious diseases had gone down at the same rate after 1937 as they had in the preceding years. That year, 1937, marked the first in which a sulfa drug became generally used in the United States.

Nearly three-fourths, or 1,100,000, of the lives saved during the period from 1938 to 1952 inclusive would have been lost to pneumonia and influenza.

The one and one-half million figure does not include a substantial number of deaths prevented from tuberculosis and some other infectious diseases that have also responded favorably to antibiotics and chemical remedies. It does include, besides pneumonia and influenza, streptococcal infections, puerperal sepsis, which is better known as childbed fever, syphilis and appendicitis.

About 76,000 mothers have been saved from death through childbed fever, or infection. Lives saved from syphilis death during the period total about 136,000 and those from appendicitis 90,000.

Some of the lives saved from influenza and pneumonia may have been lost to some other condition, such as heart disease, during an influenza epidemic, Dr. Dauer pointed out.

"During the past 30 years some diseases have actually disappeared in this country," Dr. Dauer declared.

Among these are lethargic or von Economo's encephalitis. This is the kind of so-called sleeping sickness that appeared at the end of World War I and reached its peak in the early 1920's, then apparently disappeared as an active infection for unknown reasons.

Smallpox, present since early Colonial days, is not now occurring in the United States. The few cases reported in the past two years have failed to meet the rigid criteria now demanded for a diagnosis of the disease. Vaccination, not sulfa drugs or antibiotics, has accounted for disappearance of this disease.

Malaria acquired locally is now almost a thing of the past in the United States. The few hundred cases being reported annually are, with few exceptions, of foreign origin. Chief credit for eliminating malaria goes to control of the malaria-carrying mosquitoes. However, the number of cases and deaths, it turns out, were grossly exaggerated in

the days before laboratory tests were required for positive diagnosis.

Not so many years ago most illnesses with chills and fever in some regions of the South were always regarded as malaria. With laboratory tests required for diagnosis, the reports of malaria cases declined.

Diphtheria and typhoid fever are rapidly declining to the point where they no longer are major public health problems except in a few states.

There are still about as many cases as ever of measles, mumps, chicken pox, common colds, influenza, meningococcal infections and, probably, strep sore throats, including scarlet fever. Some of these, however, have changed their character and no longer are important killers.

New diseases, Q fever and rickettsialpox, have appeared and some old ones, polio, Coxsackie virus infections, and infectious hepatitis, or jaundice, have increased in the period covered by Dr. Dauer's report.

Sulfa drugs and antibiotics cannot be credited for all the lives saved from infectious diseases, Dr. Dauer pointed out. Better nutrition of children probably has helped save some lives from such childhood diseases as whooping cough and measles.

Science News Letter, June 11, 1955

GENERAL SCIENCE

Going to Museums Is National Pastime

➤ GOING TO the museum may be replacing baseball as the national pastime.

Museums in New York had more people entering them than go to the two New York major league baseball parks in a year, Dr. Laurence V. Coleman, director of the American Association of Museums, said in connection with the organization's golden anniversary meeting in Washington.

The number of museums as well as the number of visitors has increased tremendously in the 50 years since the Association was founded. In 1905, there were about 500 museums in the country. Now there are more than 3,000.

Investment in museums has risen from \$30,000,000 to more than \$200,000,000. At least \$30,000,000 is spent each year for running expenses alone.

"Museum collections in art, science, and history have mounted in importance during the last half century so fabulously that anyone attempting to estimate their value in billions of dollars would be limited only by the wildest imagination," Dr. Coleman said.

Science News Letter, June 11, 1955

• RADIO

Saturday, June 18, 1955, 5:00-5:15 p.m. EDT
"Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service over the CBS radio network. Check your local CBS station.

Walter A. Grant, vice-president in charge of central engineering staff, Carrier Corp., Syracuse, N. Y., will discuss "Air Conditioning."

Rescheduled from June 11 due to an address by President Eisenhower on that date.

ASTRONOMY

Comet Discovered In 1933 Seen Again

➤ COMET WHIPPLE, discovered in 1933, has been seen again making its third return trip through the skies, Harvard College Observatory announced.

The diffuse heavenly object is too faint, magnitude 18, to be seen without a very large telescope. The periodic comet is named after Dr. Fred Whipple, chairman of Harvard University's astronomy department, who first spotted it in 1933. It was seen again in 1940 and 1947.

The comet is in the constellation of Pisces, the fishes. It was rediscovered by Miss Elizabeth Roemer of Lick Observatory, Mt. Hamilton, Calif.

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MEDICINE

Arthritis Damages Heart And Leg Blood Vessels

➤ RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS, or rheumatism as many call it, does more than make joints painful and stiff. It damages the heart and blood vessels in the legs.

Studies showing this were reported at the meeting of the American Rheumatism Association in Atlantic City, N. J.

The heart damage from rheumatoid arthritis consists in a thickening of tissue in one or more of the heart's valves. The ascending aorta and other arteries in and around the heart become inflamed as a result of the arthritis.

Patients with this arthritic heart damage seem, while alive, to have the same kind of heart trouble that comes from hardening of the arteries. When congestive heart failure develops, however, the ones with arthritic heart disease respond poorly to treatment, while those whose hearts were damaged by artery hardening respond well to the treatment.

Post-mortem examinations in 43 cases of the arthritic heart trouble showed the inflammatory damage, Dr. M. H. Levin of Los Angeles said.

The link between chronic arthritis and a painful condition of the blood vessels in the legs was reported by Dr. Paul J. Vignos Jr. of Cleveland.

The blood vessels get hard and swollen. The condition used to be considered a skin disease but Dr. Vignos considers the hard knots on the blood vessels a part of the general rheumatic disease.

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