

PUBLIC HEALTH

Non-Prescription Sales

Proposal of the Food and Drug Administration to sell some hydrocortisone compounds over-the-counter is being opposed by physicians and pharmacists.

► **PHYSICIANS** and pharmacists are currently fighting a Food and Drug Administration proposal to allow over-the-counter sale of hydrocortisone ointments and lotions for skin troubles.

However, manufacturers of the drugs, who started the fight, now seem to be holding back and pulling their punches. The Food and Drug Administration consequently is left holding the bag, since it must decide whether or not a drug that will relieve itching and smarting skin in some cases can be bought at drug stores, supermarkets and other places where non-prescription drug items are sold.

Some of the hydrocortisone skin medicine manufacturers started the fight by petitioning the Food and Drug Administration to allow over-the-counter sale.

First of the manufacturers to do this was the Upjohn Company of Kalamazoo, Mich. Others rapidly followed suit. Then FDA in January, 1956, issued a proposal for this, to take effect after a number of months from the announcement of the proposal.

Subsequently, skin specialists all over the country began writing to FDA opposing this idea. Their arguments are that hydrocortisone, famous as an anti-arthritis and anti-inflammation remedy, is a powerful drug which can be dangerous; that the layman cannot know whether his skin trouble is minor and may safely be treated by himself; that hydrocortisone does not help all skin conditions and may make some worse, particularly when the skin is infected as well as irritated.

Druggists joined the fight, pointing out among other things that the layman too often fails to read or heed warnings on drug labels and that if a drug is sold over-the-counter, it may be sold in stores where there is no professional pharmacist to warn the buyer of possible dangers and to urge him to follow directions on the label.

With a controversy on its hands, FDA called public hearings so that arguments on both sides could be given and evaluated.

The drug manufacturers, meanwhile, began to hold back. They did not want a fight with the doctors and pharmacists. At the hearings, they limited their testimony to facts in their records and published medical reports. They did not give arguments in favor of the measure they originally had requested.

The situation was even more complicated by reports of studies showing hydrocortisone in the ointments and lotions was absorbed through the skin in fair quantities. These reports were not available, at the time the manufacturers petitioned FDA for over-the-counter sales.

One of them was from Dr. Clarence Livingood of Detroit. His studies had been supported in part by the Upjohn Company, which also ran some of the analyses for him. Upjohn did not make him feel obligated to modify his report and the findings may in fact have changed the company's own view about over-the-counter sale.

Another surprise came in a report at the hearings that 98 skin specialists in New York who had used the drugs in treating some 90,000 patients over a period of four years did not see any adverse effects of the drug. Not all the 98 favored over-the-counter sale of the drugs, although they considered it safe with proper label precautions.

This contrasted with a report of a drug company questionnaire answered by 1,600 of 2,100 leading skin specialists throughout the nation. Of the 1,600, only 45 were in favor of over-the-counter sale for the drugs.

Final decision is up to the Food and Drug Administration which now must take a stand on the rather tangled controversy.

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MARINE BIOLOGY

Census Being Taken of World's Marine Life

► **A CENSUS** of the world's underwater populations is now underway by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

The world-wide marine survey may determine the future of fisheries' industries around the globe. Marine biologists said results of the survey can mean:

Greatly increasing the harvest of seaweed.

New uses for such intermediate links in the marine food chain as zooplankton.

Discovery of the nature and extent of stocks in relatively unexploited grounds, as well as new grounds.

Commercial uses of trash fish or species not now considered to be of any value.

The current annual world catch of fish, crustaceans and mollusks is put at about 27,000,000 metric tons. This, fishery experts pointed out, could be boosted to some 50,000,000 metric tons in the next 20 years.

An FAO expert in Rome reported that only ten percent of man's present animal protein food comes from the waters of the world.

"Fisheries," he said, "are still in a primitive state as compared with, say farming. The ultimate aim in fisheries is to conduct the industry with the same efficiency and certainty which now exists in agriculture, although, of course, we can never hope to

'farm,' as it were, all the oceans and seas. But we need to practice fish husbandry to the fullest extent within the limits possible."

The FAO in Rome is acting as the clearing house and the prime mover for the undersea life census, which is expected to take many years to complete.

Science News Letter, September 1, 1956

TECHNOLOGY

Waste Coal Salvaged With Cleaning Process

► **TESTS** of a cleaning technique used on raw coal show the method can be used to extract coal from waste materials, saving thousands of dollars for the coal industry, the U. S. Bureau of Mines has reported.

Using the process, technicians in Washington State and Alaska are salvaging hundreds of tons of waste coal for market. A coal company in Roslyn, Wash., encouraged by test results at the Bureau of Mines' pilot plant in Seattle, is recovering more than \$3,000 worth of marketable coal every month from washery refuse.

The technique, called the dense-medium process, uses a suspension of fine particles of magnetite or other heavy solids in water to separate valuable bits of coal from dirt, rock and shale. Heavy wastes sink to the bottom of a separating bath, while the lighter pieces of coal float at the top.

The Bureau of Mines tests at its Northwest Experiment Station in Seattle give the first detailed data on the technique's performance on waste materials. The dense-medium process has been used for several years to clean raw coal as it comes from the mines.

Chief purpose of the tests was to discover whether dense-medium cleaning could cut mounting coal losses at preparation plants, Bureau scientists said.

Science News Letter, September 1, 1956

OCEANOGRAPHY

Research Ship to Study Sea-Air Bondary

► **A SCIENTIFIC LOOK** at the sea and the air above it will be the mission of the New York University research schooner Action commissioned on Aug. 22.

The 65-foot, two-masted craft will first be used to measure the exchange of energy between the atmosphere and the ocean's surface. Interaction at the air-sea boundary is important in weather forecasting.

Tiny ocean waves will be investigated to determine how they reflect radar signals and reduce the usefulness of radar for navigation purposes.

The oceanographic schooner Action will later study tides and currents in the New York area, relating the findings to water pollution, bathing areas, shellfish and erosion of coastal areas.

The Action has a wide cruising radius and its construction makes it exceptionally stable while observations are being made.

Science News Letter, September 1, 1956