

MEDICINE

Medical Reporting Good

Today, when accurate reporting of science is particularly important, leaders of American medicine commend the medical reporter for a job well done.

► LEADERS of American medicine view with approval by a heavy majority the popular reporting of medicine to the American public through newspapers.

They also agree that the quality of medical reporting has improved in recent years.

In a SCIENCE SERVICE Grand Jury inquiry, in which 75 presidents of national and state medical organizations were asked: "Do the newspapers, in your opinion, in general do a medically competent and socially useful job of reporting medical progress?" the results were:

Yes, 77% (58); No, 16% (12); Not Voting, 7% (5).

To the query as to whether the quality of medical reporting in newspapers has improved in recent years, the response was:

Yes, 89% (67); No, 8% (6); Not Voting, 3% (2).

Realizing that some medical authorities do not agree that everything published in professional journals is suitable for public reporting, the jury was asked to vote on this question:

Does the daily press, in your opinion, have both right and obligation to relay to the public new medical advances published in authoritative journals or read at professional societies even if not yet widely accepted in clinical practice?

The result was: Yes, 54% (40); No, 33% (25); Not Voting, 13% (10).

Upon the suitability of reporting medical reports, there was a considerable opinion that publication of medical news should be

delayed until there is authoritative clinical demonstration and acceptance of the drugs and procedures.

Some of the comments were:

"The public cannot judge, false hopes arise and undue pressure is placed upon physicians, with resulting harm and expense to the patient."

"Caution should be exercised to avoid the crushing disappointment patients feel when they find that the facts received from the doctor are less encouraging than the newspaper report."

"The average newspaper readers have so little knowledge and understanding of medical terminology that they often misinterpret what is accurately reported."

"Many research workers, anxious to arouse public interest and further support of their project, will often imply clinical significance to their findings when actually none exists except in the imagination of that particular investigator."

"More harm can be done by reporting information not scientifically proved than if withheld until undisputable data are accumulated."

"If the idea of not publishing scientific or technical information in newspapers were extended to all fields, as it logically might be, it would be very unfortunate for the general public's education."

"There is too much optimism in headlines and warnings are delayed or deleted."

Answers to the SCIENCE SERVICE Grand Jury inquiries are given anonymously in

order to assure freedom of opinion. In the medical reporting inquiry, 68% of those invited answered the questionnaire.

Science News Letter, June 28, 1958

ASTRONOMY

Speeding Meteors Have Heat Higher Than Sun

► METEORS slamming into the earth's atmosphere at astronomical speeds produce temperatures higher than those of the sun's surface.

Dr. Klaus Oswatitsch reported this and other facts about extreme speeds to the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics meeting in Washington, D. C. Typical of all cases, he found, is the conversion of the high energy of motion into extreme states, with temperatures of several thousand degrees, frequently associated with ionization of the gas involved.

The sun-like temperatures can also be produced in the laboratory using shock tubes filled with light gases, Dr. Oswatitsch reported. For space travel rockets, he concluded, the lightest possible gases are desirable for propulsion, since the molecules have considerably higher flight velocities.

Science News Letter, June 28, 1958

ASTRONOMY

Discover Center of Milky Way Galaxy Expanding

► THE "SURPRISING" and mysterious discovery that the nucleus, or center, of the Milky Way galaxy is expanding was reported by a group of astronomers.

The hydrogen gas of a spiral arm in the Milky Way's gigantic pinwheel of stars is streaming outward as well as rotating around the galactic hub.

Dr. H. C. van de Hulst of The Observatory, Leiden, The Netherlands, told the Solvay Congress meeting in Brussels, Belgium, the discovery was a product of tuning in on radio waves at various frequencies using the 82-foot-diameter radio telescope at Dwingeloo, Holland.

The sun and its planets are about three times as far from the galactic center as the expanding region is. The outer limit of the expanding region is about three kiloparsecs, or 60 thousand billion miles, from the center.

The rotation speed of the expanding arm is 120 miles a second. The expansion is 30 miles a second. There is no indication yet that the stars and dust in this inner arm are also expanding.

Twenty-five astronomers and physicists from ten countries attended the Congress.

Those from the U. S. included Dr. Walter Baade and Dr. A. R. Sandage of Mt. Wilson and Palomar Observatories, Pasadena, Calif.; Dr. T. Gold of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; Dr. W. W. Morgan of Yerkes Observatory, Williams Bay, Wis.; Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N. J.; and Dr. Harlow Shapley, former director of Harvard College Observatory.

Science News Letter, June 28, 1958



ATOM-AGE TRAIN—The precision tracking ability of a proposed rubber-tired, nuclear powered train is demonstrated in this operating model of the 450-foot train. Unique features of the unit, designed by R. G. LeTourneau, Inc., Longview, Texas, include all wheel drive, steering from either end and a greatly improved suspension system for smooth riding. It is said to be adaptable for use with either atomic reactors or conventional engines as the power source.