

PUBLIC HEALTH

USSR Health Services Free

ALTHOUGH the general quality of medical care in Russia today falls far below that of the United States, almost every Russian citizen can take advantage of it because it does not cost a red cent.

This is one of the conclusions Drs. Thomas Parran, Otis L. Anderson and Henry VanZile Hyde, all of the U. S. Public Health Service, Dr. Malcolm Merrill, director of California's Public Health Department, and Dr. Leonid S. Snegireff, associate professor of cancer control, Harvard School of Public Health, made after returning from a tour of the medical and public health facilities of several Soviet Republics. Their report appears in the *New Physician* (Jan.).

The Iron Curtain patient has little or no freedom of choice of a physician. In addition, physicians have little voice in the final location of their practice, the visitors reported.

They found that tuberculosis is more widespread in the U.S.S.R. than in the U. S. and that the streets of the larger cities revealed alcoholism to be an obvious problem. In contrast, Soviet health museums emphasize alcoholism as a problem of capitalism.

The health of industrial workers ap-

peared to be well cared for in large industrial plants. The U. S. health officials found that such workers were provided with extensive medical care services and general hospitals. One such industrial example was a large automobile plant employing between 35,000 and 40,000 workers. An automobile called a Ziss, identical in appearance to a 1941 Packard, is produced at the plant.

Various methods of birth control are available to every citizen, the visitors found. Information on contraception is available upon request and contraceptive devices can be purchased from pharmacies on a physician's prescription. The Russian citizen receives birth control education through lectures, pamphlets and motion pictures, many of which stress the prevention of pregnancy rather than abortion.

Other conclusions the group listed included: low standard of living conditions compared with the U. S. and Western Europe; new construction is unattractive; public markets are relatively clean; health departments are taking an active part in city planning from the standpoint of sanitation and health facilities.

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GENETICS

Heredity Took Spotlight

MAN'S HEREDITY stole the spotlight in medical research of 1959, the deans of 84 medical schools agreed.

Scientists have learned a great deal in the past year about the chemistry of genetics. Dr. William S. Stone, dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, said that he considers this aspect of genetics to be the biggest single achievement in the field of scientific medicine in 1959. The deans were polled by the American Medical Association on what they thought were the greatest medical achievements during the year.

Many biochemical geneticists, including Nobel Prize winners, are looking to the day when man can plan himself, and draft and carry out plans to improve the species as to intelligence, physique and disease resistance.

Another achievement of the past year in biochemistry has been a better understanding of the inhibition of nerve impulses and the relation of such chemistry to epileptic seizures, which has led to some revolutionary thinking. This opinion was expressed by Dean Stafford L. Warren of the University of California Medical Center, Los Angeles. Significant contributions have also been made to fundamental knowledge of the learning process, he reported.

Researchers at that California Medical Center have been able to trace records of the learning process on a brain-wave detecting device. Such basic learning, he

said, may eventually mean a better understanding of the nation's major problem of mental health and bring about better methods of treatment.

The Nobel Prize winners in medicine for 1959 are Drs. Severo Ochoa of the New York College of Medicine and Arthur Kornberg of Stanford University. Both have contributed much to biochemical genetics.

Their discoveries relate to the biological synthesis of the important life compounds called DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) and RNA (ribonucleic acid). DNA is believed to be the chemical that passes on hereditary information from one generation to another. RNA is a key substance in the production of protein.

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AMA Charges Food Scare Caused Undue Alarm

THE AMERICAN Medical Association strongly criticized the Federal Government for its recent pronouncement concerning cranberries, capons and charcoal.

The Government's scientific data and the law pertaining to cranberries, charcoal and chickens caused undue alarm among the American people, Dr. John H. Talbott charges in an editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Jan. 2).

Aminotriazole was the dangerous, cancer-

causing herbicide which caused the Government to impound the nation's cranberry supply shortly before Thanksgiving.

Little stress was placed on the fact that the antithyroid action of aminotriazole is described in current text books of therapy, he points out in the editorial.

Chickens were under suspicion for only a few days in December, he says. However, neither poultry producers, manufacturing chemists, nor the chickens themselves had violated any Federal regulation. Approximately one percent of the chickens eaten in the United States have been given stilbestrol as a fattening hormone. The implantation of this pellet in chickens has been an authorized practice for more than a decade, he reports. Recent improved tests revealed that residues of the drug remained in the skin, liver and kidneys. After this discovery, immediate steps were taken to withdraw the caponettes from commerce and to suspend the sale of stilbestrol to chicken growers.

Charcoal (carbon black) is used to color licorice and black jelly beans. This food additive was listed in the Federal Registry more than one year ago as permissible for human consumption.

Its omission from the Registry in 1959 brought apprehension to the makers of licorice candy and black jelly beans. Later, a supplementary document by the Food and Drug Administration permitted processors and users of charcoal in food and candies a three-month period of grace to produce evidence that burned toast (presumably the carbon formed) is harmless, he said.

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MEDICINE

Children With Artificial Limbs Do Normal Acts

MOST CHILDREN handicapped by the loss of an arm or leg can become nearly as independent as other boys and girls, the chief of the Federal Government's Children's Bureau reports.

The artificial arms and legs now available can be fitted on youngsters. When these boys and girls are properly trained to use them, they can perform most functions, Katherine B. Oettinger explains in a new pamphlet, "The Child With a Missing Arm or Leg."

The past history of the development of artificial limbs centers around rapid adaptations of devices developed for veterans of World War II. The pamphlet points out that there are various kinds of prosthetic devices available. In addition to the adult-sized hand already on the market for both men and women, a child's hand is now being tested prior to being put in general use.

The Federal Government pamphlet offers parents of handicapped children these tips: fit and train the child to his prosthesis as soon as possible, the earlier the better; do not blame anyone for the child's defect; encourage him to participate in activities with normal children; do not "baby" the handicapped.

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