Isoniazid Honored

The leading tuberculosis drug, isoniazid, was honored in New York on the tenth anniversary of its public announcement Feb. 21, 1962.


Dr. Tucker acted as moderator of the National Tuberculosis Association luncheon meeting at the Overseas Press Club in New York at which the remarkable TB drug was discussed.

A 55% reduction from the VA hospitals' peak load of 16,000 veterans with tuberculosis in 1954, Dr. Tucker said, has resulted since isoniazid, in combination with other drugs, has come into use.

Isoniazid, which is chemically isonicotinic acid hydrazide, can be given either by mouth or intramuscularly, but it has been found more successful in treating TB patients when combined with other antituberculosis drugs. It is usually given with PAS (para-aminosalicylic acid) or both PAS and streptomycin.

"We expect to have only 7,000 TB patients in VA hospitals soon," Dr. Tucker said. Drug treatment has made hospital stays possible, and fewer are getting tuberculosis, he explained.

Also praising isoniazid for its safety, cheapness and ease of administration is Dr. Edward Kulpa, tuberculosis regional adviser for the Pan American Health Organization.

"In most of the Latin American countries, tuberculosis is still the number one killer," Dr. Kulpa told Science Service, "but isoniazid is reducing the number of tuberculosis patients."

Kulpa said that plans move forward under the alliance for progress, he hopes the public health programs for Latin America will receive necessary funds, thus making it possible to reduce further the incidence of tuberculosis.

At the "isoniazid reunion" luncheon the future use of isoniazid was discussed by Dr. James E. Perkins, managing director of the National Tuberculosis Association, along with Drs. Edward H. Robitsek and Irving J. Selikoff, who were in charge of the early clinical trials of isoniazid at Sea View Hospital, Staten Island, N. Y., and Drs. Walsh McDermott and Carl Muschenheim, who headed a similar team at New York Hospital.

Premature publicity ten years ago damaged the reputation of isoniazid. On May 13, 1953, a newspaper datelined Washington carried the headline "Danced for Joy, But Now They're Dead."

The shocking headline referred to a national magazine's picture of TB patients dancing after treatment with the "miracle" drug. Unfortunately, their disease had progressed too far for lasting drug effects.

Also, when the newspaper stories first came out, the Food and Drug Administration had not yet approved the drug. Since it was still tested by the E. R. Squibb and Hoffmann-La Roche pharmaceutical laboratories where isoniazid was simultaneously discovered.

But ten years and many studies later, isoniazid is being tested not only for treatment of TB but as a possible preventive.

The Public Health Service in a preliminary report recently said that isoniazid had been 80% effective in preventing tuberculosis when tried out on 12,000 persons in constant contact with TB cases.

More than 3,000,000 persons are still dying of tuberculosis each year throughout the world, in spite of the great progress in treatment. In this country alone, 250,000 have active TB.


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