

MEDICINE

Isoniazid Honored

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

Dr. William B. Tucker, director of the Veterans Administration pulmonary disease service in Washington, D. C., told SCIENCE SERVICE that VA gives isoniazid the greatest single credit of any drug for tuberculosis treatment.

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 anti-tubercular drugs. It is usually given with PAS (para-aminosalicylic acid) or with both PAS and streptomycin.

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

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

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

Dr. Kupka said that as 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. Robitzek 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, "They 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 being tested by the E. R. Squibb and Hoffmann-LaRoche 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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GENERAL SCIENCE

Future Not Foreseen

► MAD DREAMERS about the future of science are today not sufficiently mad realists to prophesy what will happen longer ahead than 40 or so years, about the year 2000, Dr. John Rader Platt, professor of physics at the University of Chicago, declares in a book, "The Excitement of Science," (Houghton Mifflin) just published.

Even the writers of science fiction have not been sufficiently enthusiastic about the wonders of the scientific future. Edward Bellamy in his book, "Looking Backward, 2000-1887," merely projected the technology of the times and did not foresee that the automobile was to have more effect for economic and political equality than his communal Utopia.

When H. G. Wells in 1902 wrote "An-

tipications," a serious attempt to predict what would happen in the 20th century, he foresaw the social effects of the horseless carriage but his transportation predictions for the whole century were fulfilled in 25 years. Wells predicted a year before the Wright brothers' successful flight at Kitty Hawk that "very probably before 1950 a successful aeroplane will have soared and come home safe and sound."

Later, Dr. Platt observes, Wells foresaw nuclear weapons and the possibility that they might make war impossible. But he did not imagine radar, jet propulsion, long-range rockets, steel skyscrapers, plastics, vitamins, plasma, antibiotics, and new tools such as radioactive tracers and the electron microscope.

To estimate far off invention, Dr. Platt concludes that within broad limits the best guide is not going to be a technical guide at all, but simply the knowledge of what men really and deeply want.

"Today the limitations on the development of science and invention in the foreseeable future," Dr. Platt writes, "seem to be set only loosely by nature, more tightly by the abilities of exceptional minds, but most tightly of all by the human desire and its balance of values. The intricacy of problems we can eventually solve, the complexity of communications we can organize and the amount of power we can control are vast beyond imagining. Very nearly, we will go where we wish and make what we will."

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