

MEDICINE

Retardation Cases High

Mental retardation, which ranks fifth in frequency of occurrence among disabling diseases, becomes a lifetime problem unless prevented by early detection and treatment.

► MENTAL RETARDATION afflicts twice as many persons as blindness, polio, cerebral palsy and rheumatic heart disease combined, the White House Conference on Mental Retardation at Airlie House near Warrenton, Va., was told.

Only four important disabling conditions have a higher prevalence than this early illness, Dr. Leonard W. Mayo, chairman of President Kennedy's Panel on Mental Retardation, told the representatives of state governments.

The four conditions are heart disease, cancer, arthritis, and mental illness, which is different from mental retardation. All four of these illnesses tend to come late in life. The mentally retarded have a defect in intelligence that is a lifetime problem, but the mentally ill often need only temporary care.

States and communities spend \$300 million a year for the care of more than 200,000 adults and children in institutions, in addition to some \$250 million for special education, welfare, rehabilitation and other services outside of public institutions. Federal funds for the mentally retarded have nearly doubled in five years.

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Homes Affect Mentality

► CHILDREN BORN and raised in homes without books, good music and other cultural and educational advantages can develop mental retardation even though they had no physical damage before birth.

Their inability to keep up with their classmates may lead to juvenile delinquency.

Nobelist George W. Beadle, who helped establish a new field now commonly known as biochemical genetics, told the White House Conference on Mental Retardation at Airlie House near Warrenton, Va., that such children are discouraged to the point where their very school experience injures them. Dr. Beadle is now president of the University of Chicago.

"Let me give an example," he said. "Near the University of Chicago is a square mile area, largely Negro-populated, characterized by overcrowding, substandard housing, unemployment, many fatherless families, and a high incidence of working mothers with young children.

"What happens to a child born into this kind of subculture, surrounded by a quite different kind of culture? The opportunity to acquire a normal vocabulary may be practically nonexistent. Books are scarce, music is limited in kind and amount.

"Parental interest may be very little. Even disregarding the well-known disad-

A greatly strengthened program of maternal and infant care is recommended in urban centers. In 138 cities in the U.S. with populations of more than 100,000, there are 1,250,000 births each year—about 30% of all the babies born in this country annually.

Dr. Mayor emphasized the need for improved care on the 375,000 mothers in this urban group who are too poor to have medical attention up to their confinement. About 75,000 of these medically indigent mothers have some complications in pregnancy and need special services.

Prevention of mental retardation is possible through early detection and treatment of such metabolic disorders as phenylketonuria, or PKU, which can be treated if discovered in time.

Education for teachers of the mentally retarded is needed, and community facilities should be changed to meet the needs of this group of children. Dr. Mayo said vocational rehabilitation and workshop facilities also must be greatly expanded.

The U.S. Congress is giving strong support to legislative proposals for helping the mentally retarded and the mentally ill.

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Two Different Types Of Emphysema Indicated

► EMPHYSEMA, a chronic obstructive lung disease whose cause is not known, appears to be localized in sections of the lung in some cases. In other patients, however, diffuse conditions are found, indicating these are two different types that may originate and progress as distinct diseases.

Drs. L. G. Bentivoglio, F. Beerel, P. B. Stewart, A. C. Bryan, W. C. Ball Jr., and D. V. Bates reported the study, in which radioactive gas was used, in the American Review of Respiratory Diseases, 88:315, 1963. The study was made at the Joint Cardio-Respiratory Service, Royal Victoria Hospital, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

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Colombian Measure Eases Drug Prices

► COLOMBIA is about to enact a law designed to end a battle between drug firms, including some from the United States, and make many types of drugs available to its poor for the first time.

The bill, which has passed the Colombian Congress, awaits certain signing by President Guillermo Leon Valencia.

Dr. Santiago Renjifo Salcedo, Colombian Minister of Public Health, outlined details and implications of the law at a session of the Pan American Health Organization in Washington, D. C.

The touchy matter of drug sales in Latin America was discussed behind closed doors before a committee headed by the late Sen. Estes Kefauver (D-Tenn.) earlier this year.

Part of the problem has been that drug firms operating in some Latin American countries have been suspected of conspiring to keep drug prices high. They are accused of using underhanded tactics against firms that try to cut prices.

Instead of reducing prices to spark demand for their drugs, firms have engaged in heavy advertising campaigns.

"Our people are too poor to go to the drugstores and choose between all the different brands," Dr. Renjifo said, "and they do not understand the advertising."

The new law would allow the Colombian government to obtain drugs at reduced prices for distribution to the poor.

"This should mean nothing to prices in the United States or in any other country," Dr. Renjifo said. "It does mean that any drug company in any country may sell drugs in Colombia."

The U.S. Senate, meanwhile, is slated to resume its general drug investigation on Dec. 1.

Dr. Martinez J. Heliodoro, Cuba's Undersecretary for Health and Epidemiology, who also attended the meeting, told SCIENCE SERVICE that it is "up to the other countries in Latin America to solve their problems."

Cuba nationalized all drug firms, including some from the United States, that operated within its borders.

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