

PUBLIC HEALTH

Biggest Quackery Racket

Quackery in the form of food faddism and dietary products victimizes the public. False claims for treatments of diseases and easy ways to reduce are made—By Faye Marley

► **FOOD FADDISM** and nutritional quackery are the biggest rackets in the health field, Commissioner George P. Larrick of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration told the Second National Congress on Medical Quackery in Washington, D. C.

"A few days after our 1961 meeting," the Commissioner said, "a U.S. marshal seized \$3,800 worth of Nutri-Bio food supplement from an Atlanta sales agent who had been recommending it for such conditions as alcoholism, arthritis, cancer, stomach ulcers and other serious ailments."

Literature on Nutri-Bio made further claims that included help for frigidity, anemia, heart trouble, infections and nervousness, and promised health, beauty, athletic ability and the capacity to stay young and vital. It even was recommended as a cure for juvenile delinquency, Commissioner Larrick said.

Some of the 75,000 full- and part-time salesmen spent life savings to become "generals" (for \$10,000) so they could get top commissions.

The ingredients of Nutri-Bio—unsaturated fatty acids, bio-flavonoid complex, alfalfa juice and various mineral and trace elements—had been represented as essential in human nutrition, and the Government charged misbranding in such a claim.

Unsaturated fats, especially safflower oil, were particularly recommended in the book "Calories Don't Count," Commissioner Larrick pointed out.

The first 11 printings of the book, which has sold more than two million copies, contained a commercial advertisement for safflower oil in the form of capsules marketed by Cove Vitamin and Pharmaceutical, Inc. The FDA seized both the book and the capsules when they were displayed together.

Commissioner Larrick exonerated the original author of the book, a physician who said he did not know how it was to be edited and promoted.

"The promise of an easy way to reduce seems to be irresistible to a great many people," the Commissioner said, adding that the basic premise of the book is unfortunately false.

"When it comes to weight reduction, calories do count."

Scores of other actions have been taken by FDA against food faddism and nutritional quackery, some of them resulting in heavy penalties.

The Vitamin Products Company was fined \$7,000 and the head of the firm, Dr. Royal Lee, a nonpracticing Milwaukee dentist, was given a one-year suspended prison sentence and put on probation for three years for violating the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act.

A Federal court order prohibited the firm from shipping 115 special dietary products, misbranded by "false claims for the treatment of more than 500 diseases and conditions."

Dr. Lee, along with others who were fined, prosecuted or imprisoned, were mentioned by Commissioner Larrick as being members of the National Health Federation, which held a "Congress on Health Monopoly" in Washington concurrently with the medical quackery meeting.

The claimed purpose of this National Health Federation, Commissioner Larrick said, is to "promote freedom of choice" in the health field.

"In practice this means freedom to promote eccentric, unproved medicines and treatments."

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MEDICINE

Seek Meningitis Vaccine

► A **VACCINE** that will prevent meningitis is being sought.

When found, it would solve the problem of meningitis outbreaks among military recruits, Dr. Harry A. Feldman of the State University of New York Upstate Medical Center, Syracuse, told *SCIENCE SERVICE*.

The death of a five-month-old baby whose uncle, a recruit at the U.S. Naval Training Center in San Diego, Calif., visited the home and brought deadly meningococcal infection with him has alerted bacteriologists to make the search for a vaccine.

After 24 years of successful prevention against meningococcal disease, Dr. Feldman said specific strains of *Neisseria meningitidis* have become resistant to the sulfonamides usually used for treatment or prevention.

Strains from both civilians and military personnel are being collected all over the United States and from parts of Europe and Africa. Deaths from meningitis in the past 10 to 12 years are estimated at 100,000 to 250,000 in Chad, Upper Volta, Nigeria, Niger and Sudan.

The epidemics in military installations, especially in San Diego, Dr. Feldman said, have obviously come from recruits among civilian populations. From one percent to seven percent of these recruits are carriers, and when they are in close contact, as in a training center, meningococcal infections of varying degrees of seriousness result.

Probably only seven percent or eight percent of those who acquire the bacteria will have any detectable illness, and about half of them will have no more than a rash that is sometimes mistaken for measles, Dr. Feldman said.



HEW

CURE-ALL QUACKERY—"Radi-*onic*" contraption developed by Ruth B. Drown, Los Angeles, who was fined \$1,000 after trial by jury. (Picture was posed.)

"But I saw one man die within an hour after his illness was diagnosed," he said. "This patient went into severe shock with septicemia and hemorrhages in his tissues."

Although meningococcal bacteria were handled easily until after World War II, resistance to sulfadiazine is showing up and could lead to serious conditions, even epidemics in public schools.

Dr. Feldman spoke at the Third Inter-science Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy in Washington, D. C.

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MEDICINE

Simple Test Indicates Barbiturate Poisoning

► **PHYSICIANS** can quickly tell if a person in a coma of unknown origin has taken barbiturate poison by using a new simple test.

The test requires only a small beaker, a magnetic stirrer and a water pump. A tiny amount of blood is added to chloroform, water and mercuric chloride, and the beaker containing the mixture stirred. Any barbiturates in the blood react with the mercury to form mercuric salts that will not dissolve in water, but are soluble in chloroform.

Using a coloring agent, dithizone, the solution will turn from green to orange if there are barbiturate poisons in the blood, Dr. A. S. Curry of the British Home Office Forensic Science Laboratory, Harrogate, reported in the *British Medical Journal*, Oct. 26, 1963.

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