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FROM BRITAIN

### Hidden Illness

A massive amount of hidden illness being uncovered in health surveys in London involves men much more than women.

Nearly 6,000 apparently healthy persons took an average of five tests each at a center opened by Dr. R. J. Donaldson, health officer at Rotherham.

More than 1,000 failed at least one test, Dr. Donaldson reports. Nearly 2,000 men took part in the health check and were found twice as likely as the women to have hidden illness.

One man in four and one woman in seven were shown to need treatment for unsuspected defects.

These ranged from eye trouble to diabetes, cancer and heart disease. Some required urgent treatment, which was made immediately available.

There were five cases of active tuberculosis and two of cervical cancer.

"We have found," says Dr. Donaldson, "that illness, particularly high blood pressure and diabetes, can develop until it is really serious without the slightest sign or warning to those concerned." Special lung, heart and artery checks were available only for men.

The more serious illnesses uncovered included 18 cases of abnormally high blood pressure in men aged 30 to 59 and 16 unsuspecting diabetics.

Seventy-three men were found to have heart trouble and 128 chest illness. Fifty women are having further tests for breast tumors.

More than 100 people were anemic, 56 failed a hearing test, and 448, including 182 already wearing glasses, failed a vision test.

#### FROM SWITZERLAND

### City Sickness

As people on every continent leave their farms and villages to converge on cities, they bring with them, or create, health problems with which the world's doctors are wrestling.

More than 400 doctor-delegates from 128 member nations are exploring the health risks posed by city sprawl and congestion during the 20th annual World Health Assembly in Geneva.

By the end of the century, WHO doctors estimate, 80 percent of the world's population will live in cities.

Colleagues of Dr. Pavel Macuch, Czechoslovakian Health Minister and conference chairman, note that the most dramatic pressures and statistics have been coming from Asia, Africa and Latin America, "where no amount of regulations, laws or degrees thus far

have been able to stem the human tide." Many urban areas have doubled their populations in the past 10 years, and are expected to double them again by 1975.

Only five percent of 250 million people living in cities in poorer countries enjoy even rudimentary healthprotecting services—a figure based on surveys and data provided by the countries themselves.

In the richer countries, health authorities are warning more and more about air and water pollution, overcrowding, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency and tension-building noise and traffic.

A report from Great Britain says two-thirds of all infant deaths there could be prevented by eliminating overcrowding, poverty and overemployment of women.

India's health ministry says Calcutta is typical. Almost 80 percent of families there live in a single room and up to 50 people share one privy.

Kinshasa in the Republic of the Congo is one of many African cities where masses of unskilled and unlettered young people, lacking city experience, have created huge "reservoirs of venereal and other diseases, alcoholism and delinquency."

The United Kingdom, Russia. Sweden, Brazil, France and others are making attempts to decentralize. Venezuela has created a new city port to relieve the capital. Burma is replanning old towns and settling squatters around Rangoon in satellite cities. Americans expect to house an entire neighborhood in one building. The Communist countries all have planned communities in the country. The Russians strictly separate work and residential areas by green belts.

In an effort to hold back the tides of in-migration, the Russians are working to keep medical talent in the countryside. Priority in education is given, according to Dr. L. A. Sakvarelidse, health minister of the Georgian Republic, to rural students who are likely to return to their regions rather than stay in the city.

### FROM CANADA

## **Bridge Stress Measured**

For some time engineers suspected that bridges in Canada are overdesigned to withstand the impact of moving ice during the spring breakup. Since little information is available, an engineering team in Alberta Province designed a movable steel pier-a sort of steel nose or shield-to measure and record ice pressure.

The recorder is strong enough to resist an ice force of 400 tons, yet (see p. 531)

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delicate enough to measure just what the forces are.

The device has been installed on the center pier of a bridge over the Athabasca River 100 miles north of Edmonton. Ice measurements are being taken now that the river ice has broken up. Designers hope to determine if building codes that call for bridge piers to resist 29 tons of force per square foot are reasonable. If it can be confirmed that ice forces are substantially less considerable cost savings could be achieved in the construction of bridges in Canada and other northern countries.

FROM BRITAIN

### **Neurotics Assessed**

Neurotic illnesses result in the loss of 17 million working days a year in England and Wales—yet only one in three of the people involved has ever been seen by a psychiatrist.

The Mental Health Research Fund has now allocated its biggest grant—nearly \$100,000—for a research team to inquire into the problem of neuroticism. The team, already at work in a London borough, is headed by Dr. Brian Cooper of the London University Institute of Psychiatry.

The neurotic individual, quite apart from his psychological problem, is more frequently physically ill than the average man, and the same is true of his family. The initial aim of the research program is to look closely into the social and medical needs of people who suffer from neurotic and psychosomatic illnesses.

In order to assess the problems of the general practitioner in relation to these illnesses, the team psychiatrists will interview patients in the doctors' office. Patients will also be visited at home by the psychiatric social worker.

In this way it should be possible to estimate what percentage of psychologically-ill patients are in need of direct psychiatric treatment, and also to learn how many would benefit from the advice and support of a social worker or social agency.

FROM MEXICO

## 250 Species Doomed

At least 250 species of animal and bird life are condemned to extinction in Mexico and Central America.

Philip K. Crowe, former United States Ambassador to Uruguay, Peru and Brazil, recently completed a several-month study trip sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund. He talked with presidents of the five Central American republics as well as Mexi-

can officials, to exchange ideas on conservation of flora and fauna.

Among species apparently doomed, Crowe found, are the tapir, the blue whale, the eagle and the spotted bear.

He says drastic enforcement of bans on hunting of declining species, and setting up of wildlife sanctuaries are urgently needed.

Most frequent response by Central American authorities, is that they lack financing and personnel to enforce conservation measures.

FROM AUSTRIA

### **Atom Wastes**

Careful handling of atomic wastes could not only avoid pollution of land, seas and skies but yield valuable new industrial and medical products.

Dr. L. H. Keher of Australia's Atomic Energy Commission and former chief of the Health, Safety and Waste Disposal Division of the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna calls for a storage policy rather than disposal.

He singles out the gas xenon, whose present commercial use is primarily in the lighting industry. Its possible applications in medicine, particularly for anesthetics, and in practical chemistry. remain unexplored.

Scientists have recently discovered the reactive behavior of this element, once a "rare gas." It is produced by nuclear fission in quantity sufficient for commercialization.

Xenon is still expensive at \$5 per gram, mostly provided by the liquid air industry. But the nuclear power industry will increase the supply to about 35 tons annually by 1980, thereby lowering the price, he predicts.

Dr. Keher recommends that industry scientists study how to recover stable isotopes formed from decay. "Isotopes must first be considered to have valuable uses," he says. "Therefore they should be stored as liquid, without adding materials that could make the later recovery of certain precious elements difficult."

FROM AUSTRALIA

## **Breeding Dibblers**

The Western Australian Museum has sent three dibblers, one male and two female, to La Trobe University, Melbourne, to see if the small marsupials can be bred in captivity.

A museum spokesman said that since the report of the re-discovery of the rare dibblers last month, many people had written describing small marsupials they thought were dibblers. He said they were more probably short-nosed bandicoots.

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