

medical sciences notes

INFECTION

Travel Spreads Scleroma in U.S.

Approximately 171 cases of a chronic infection of the respiratory tract called scleroma, which is often fatal, have been reported in the United States and Canada. Increased travel from Europe, Asia and Africa, where the disease has been primarily confined, is blamed.

The increase is much greater in South and Central Americas, a team of physicians at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York says in the December issue of *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ROENTGENOLOGY, RADIUM THERAPY AND NUCLEAR MEDICINE*.

X-ray studies show hardened patches of nose and throat tissue that can extend down the respiratory tract including the bronchial tubes. Duration of the disease, which occurs mainly at ages 16 to 35, has a 14-year average, but it can last as long as 46 years.

Antibiotics seem to offer the best hope of successful treatment, but the doctors say the relapse rate, chronic duration and deaths remain high.

Drs. Frieda Feldman and William B. Seaman, radiologists, and Dr. Daniel C. Baker Jr., ear and throat specialist, report the study. Scleroma was first diagnosed in 1870 as a manifestation of syphilis, but is now generally regarded as an unrelated infection.

ATHEROSCLEROSIS

Fat-free Diet Ups Artery Hardening

If humans are like rabbits, a low-calorie diet will only make their artery-clogging worse.

A low-calorie diet forces the body to draw on its fat reserves, but it does not cause the break up of fatty atherosclerotic deposits. So part of the stored fat released into the blood may actually be deposited in the arteries.

This finding has been reported by two George Washington University physicians, working under grants from the National Heart Institute.

First the researchers put 37 rabbits on a high-cholesterol diet for 12 weeks. Postmortem examination of 10 of the rabbits revealed atherosclerosis covering one-fourth of the aorta. The remaining animals were placed in two groups, one receiving a normal diet of 100 grams of food pellets daily, the other receiving only 50 grams.

Postmortem examination of these two groups showed increased atherosclerosis in both, but the fatty deposits now covered considerably over half of the aortic surface of the rabbits on the low-calorie diet. Animals on the normal diet showed an increase of the deposits up to one-third.

Rabbits are peculiarly sensitive to the development of hardening of the arteries when placed on high fat diets, but similar experiments are now being conducted on sub-human primates, which will show a closer comparison with man.

Drs. J. Martyn Bailey and Jean Butler report the study.

634/science news/vol. 92/30 december 1967

SYNTHETIC PLASTIC

New Material Used in Heart Pump

Calves have been tested with an experimental heart pump that contains tubing made of a synthetic plastic used in women's girdles. The trade name of the material is Lycra, produced by E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., Inc.

Dr. Lester Goodman of the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Md., says the material appears to be biologically inert so far, having been used in animals for 11-day periods.

Dr. Goodman is chief of the biomedical engineering and instrumentation branch of the NIH division of research services.

RHEUMATIC DISEASES

Rheumatics Get Spanish Trip

The Swedish Association against Rheumatic Diseases will send groups of 90 rheumatism patients to the Southern coast of Spain near Gibraltar for periods of six weeks beginning Jan. 12.

The association has rented a hotel in Fuengirola on Costa del Sol, where the climate is reported dry and even and said to be "just right for easing rheumatic ailments."

The association is employing a Spanish doctor part-time and a Swedish physician full time to supervise treatment. There will also be Swedish nurses, physical therapists and work therapists on hand. Necessary medical equipment has already been installed, and a separate building set aside for doctors' offices and treatment rooms.

The patients will be selected by their physicians. It is hoped that the project can be extended in future to take 400 patients in each six-week group.

BEAUTY MARKS

Goiter Pleased Raphael, Rubens

When a doctor looks at a Raphael or Rubens painting in an art gallery he sees something besides beauty in the large necks of some of their models. Their thickness indicates goiter, caused by an enlarged thyroid gland.

Dr. John R. K. Preedy, professor of medicine at Emory University, Atlanta, Ga., says goiter must have been fairly common in the early 16th century, judging from the thick-necked ladies in the paintings. Their particular type of large neck was a mark of beauty in their day.

The thyroid is an endocrine gland in the neck that secretes a hormone called thyroxine, which affects some aspects of growth and development as well as the metabolic rate that regulates body processes.

The Rubens and Raphael ladies were not necessarily hyperthyroid, Dr. Preedy explains. A goiter may also occur when the thyroid output is normal.