

# Medical Sciences Notes

## MEDICARE

### Higher Medicare Taxes Predicted

Higher Medicare taxes may be necessary to meet the increased hospital costs.

Chairman Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.) of the House Ways and Means Committee warns that something will have to be done to raise revenues. His prediction came at hearings on the Administration's Social Security proposals, at which representatives of the American Hospital Association said an 18.6 percent increase in total hospital expenses were anticipated in the 12-month period ending next Sept. 30.

The Medicare tax is now one-half of one percent, paid by both employers and workers, figured on the first \$6,600 of a person's income. It is scheduled to increase in steps to eight-tenths of one percent.

An alternative to raising taxes would be to divert to Medicare some of the Social Security tax earmarked for retirement benefits. Mills said this has been over-estimated.

## RADIATION DANGER

### Radiation Speeds Up Aging

Evidence strongly supports the view that radiation speeds up aging, according to Dr. Herman T. Blumenthal of Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.

"Chromosomal changes similar to those seen in 'natural' aging also occur in irradiated individuals," he says in the February issue of *SCIENTIST AND CITIZEN*.

Three human populations that have undergone heavy exposures should be studied intensively for possible life-shortening effects of radiation, he advises.

These include Japanese who survived the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings; Eskimos who experienced relatively high exposures from weapons tests carried out between 1949 and 1961, and residents of Utah and Nevada exposed to high levels of iodine 131 from these tests during the same period.

Dr. Blumenthal is a gerontology research associate in biopsychology and is a founder of the Committee for Nuclear Information.

## ALCOHOLISM

### Liver Damage Linked to Bad Diet

Though chronic alcoholism and liver damage have traditionally been linked together, evidence is accumulating that points to a protein-deficient diet rather than liquor itself as the culprit.

Scientists from the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto have found in tests on rats with liver lesions like those in alcoholics that tissue degeneration proceeds more rapidly in animals given a low-protein diet than in those fed meat and other protein-rich foods in combination with alcohol.

Test results from various animal groups, each receiving a different diet, show that the injurious effect of alcohol is mediated through dietary factors rather than by any theoretically direct toxic action of alcohol on the liver.

Alcoholics should eat "super" protein and vitamin foods to protect their livers, Drs. Osvaldo R. Koch,

Eduardo A. Porta and W. Stanley Hartroft told the meeting of the International Academy of Pathology in Washington, D.C., last week.

## BIOLOGY

### World Biology—Phase II

An urgent call has gone out to all U.S. biologists to join in the worldwide five-year plan to learn enough about biology to enable man to control his environment and himself, and to know enough to avoid making irreversible changes in his world.

The International Biological Program, functioning as a planning organization since 1963, will enter its operational phase in July of this year. A report issued last week by the U.S. Committee for the IBP outlines the crucial areas of study of world biology and lists specific ways for scientists to participate in this monumental research effort that has the support of 38 countries.

About 30 working conferences are being planned to encourage the development of research projects.

## CRYOSURGERY

### Surgery Relieves MS Tremor

The same cryosurgery on the thalamus of the brain, which has been successful in relieving the tremor of shaking palsy, or Parkinson's disease, has been used for 32 multiple sclerosis patients who have had the similar symptom of intention tremor.

Dr. Irving S. Cooper of St. Barnabas Hospital, New York City, reports success in 27 of the cases.

Although there is no specific treatment that can relieve the chronic progressive form of multiple sclerosis, which includes many symptoms, Dr. Cooper says he considers it worthwhile to call attention to the fact that this one common symptom can be abolished with a relatively low risk and high incidence of success.

More than 5,000 patients have undergone surgery for the involuntary movements of parkinsonism and similar diseases at St. Barnabas since 1952, Dr. Cooper says in the March 6 issue of the *JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION*.

## DRUG ACTION

### Sex Hormones Alter Drug Action

Sleeping pills work longer when given after multiple doses of an estrogen or substance that stimulates female sex hormones. Conversely, prior doses of an androgen or male stimulant significantly reduced the length of drug action in recent tests on both male and female rats.

Dr. T. Gessner and associates at the State University of New York at Buffalo reports that the effect of both hexobarbital, a sleep inducing chemical, and chlorzoxazone, a muscle relaxant, is extended when the activity of female sex hormones is increased and that drug response time is cut by male sex hormones.

Results of studies of the mechanism of androgen activity indicate the androgen stimulates a drug-metabolizing enzyme that causes a deactivation of hexobarbital.