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LETTER FROM GENEVA

Biological psychiatry; other news

The World Health Organization is preparing a research program in biological psychiatry, creating a new section in its Mental Health Unit under Dr. Pieter Baan, Dutch psychiatrist.

A Johnny-come-lately in the UN medical agency, mental health's activities have been devoted mostly to social psychiatry, including studies of the epidemiology of schizophrenia and the optimal organization of psychiatric services for member states.

Dr. Baan has appointed Dr. Boris Lebedev, formerly director of the Bekhterev Neuropsychiatric Institute in Leningrad, to head the new section.

Dr. Lebedev and his colleagues have selected four sub-categories for investigation: biochemistry, neurophysiology, genetics and psychopharmacology. Expert panels are being established for each subject, and WHO will develop international cooperative research projects in each.

Schizophrenia, assumed the world's foremost serious mental illness with estimates of incidence ranging up from one percent of population, will draw the attention of biologically oriented psychiatrists in all of the four categories, Dr. Lebedev says.

Next year, Dr. Lebedev plans to organize a conference on schizophrenia.

Geriatrics, mental deficiencies and epilepsy are also under review.

Dr. Lebedev says the efficacy of tranquilizers, antidepressants and consciousness-expanding drugs will be tested on a comparative international basis.

WHO doctors claim good results against dread cerebrospinal meningitis in Africa, where epidemics occur.

Prof. Louis Greenberg of Ottawa contributed two experimental vaccines, one a totally bacterial model, the other obtained by enzymatic lysis. A third type has been supplied by the Institut Merieux in France.

Dr. Josef Pacenka, WHO specialist in the disease, has been using all three in controlled field trials in Upper Volta. Thus far, he reports, reactions are mild and protection is good.

A few cases have occurred among vaccinated individuals, and he and the staff of the Muzaz Institute in Bobo Dioulasso are examining spinal fluid specimens.

Dr. Pacenka suspects a carrier mechanism. Suspected disease-harboring patients, both vaccinated and unvaccinated, are being screened.

Soviet researchers are studying various typhoid and paratyphoid vaccines for WHO.

Dr. L. B. Hejfec and his team at the Mecnikov Vaccine and Sera Institute. Moscow, report that field trials demonstrate that chemical, heat-killed, and alcoholized vaccines all confer good protection.

The immunological history of vaccinated individuals showed no influence on vaccine efficacy. One dose was usually as good as two.

The project failed to show that typhoid vaccines confer any cross-immunity to paratyphoid. The Russians say the very low antigenic properties of the paratyphoid vaccines makes combined agents undesirable.

The Algerian socialist regime has tightened its grip on the health professions. Everyone qualifying in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and even midwifery now automatically become state officials and must serve full time in public hospitals and services.

After one year of such compulsory work, they can resume study to spe-

Elsewhere in Africa, Franco-Anglophile Cameroon authorities have had to relax their demands. In the past only medical graduates from French or British medical schools could practice medicine there. Because of the persistent shortage of doctors, Cameroon will now accept native or foreign physicians from elsewhere.

Shipping pathogenic fecal specimens to WHO's laboratories has posed problems, particularly from tropical areas.

Ordinarily, in the filter or blotting paper method, drops are dried and packed in cellophane bags. But temperatures above 32 degrees C. and dampness above 70 percent make the materials useless.

WHO doctors gave a grant to Dr. H. L. Wolff, professor of tropical medicine at Leiden University to study other techniques.

Dr. Wolff reports a reliable way, modifying the liquid nitrogen container that has been used both to ship the sperm of prize bulls and to bring in sera from victims of yaws and syphilis.

Dr. Wolff and his team mold a new plastic, Surlyn A, into fine tubing, which they cut into slender sacks and fill through a hostalene funnel, finally sealing, at both ends with heat.

David Alan Ehrlich

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