

MEDICINE

"Hit and Run Rheumatism," Makes Debut as New Disease

New Type "Strikes Fiercely and Leaves Shortly";
Hits Finger, Wrist, Shoulder, Knee, Toe, or Elbow

A NEW disease, "hit and run rheumatism," made its debut at the meeting of the American Rheumatism Association in New York City.

The disease, also termed "'phantom rheumatism'—now you see it, now you don't," was described by Dr. Philip S. Hench, of the Mayo Clinic, in his presidential address.

From six to nine new patients with this ailment are now appearing every year at the Mayo Clinic, but Dr. Hench believes there may be many more whose ailment has not yet been recognized.

Both sexes get this disease, although there were a few more women than men among the 34 cases reported by Dr. Hench today. This sort of rheumatism "strikes fiercely and leaves shortly. Although it often strikes fiercely, it does not destroy the joint," Dr. Hench said in describing it.

The attacks usually last one to three days, rarely more than one week. Intervals between attacks vary from one or two days to one to six months. Favorite spots of attack were a finger joint, wrist, shoulder, knee, toe or elbow, though practically any joint is liable to attack.

Some patients had "hundreds" of attacks, "too many to remember." Others had as few as from two to ten per year. Patients have endured the disease as long as 25 years, the average length for the 34 patients being seven years. Dr. Hench has figured that 30 patients have had a total of at least 4,930 attacks.

The pain is generally a severe ache, but occasionally is so severe narcotic

drugs are needed to give relief. Disability was considerable among these patients and some were often forced to go to bed during an attack.

No cure for the disease has been discovered, though many kinds of treatment were tried. One patient "adopted a baby, quit worrying about herself, and was cured."

Three other patients got well, perhaps spontaneously, 12 are better, 7 are just the same, the disease going "merrily on," 3 are somewhat worse and one died of heart disease.

Science News Letter, June 22, 1940

Tendency Inherited

SUSCEPTIBILITY to rheumatic fever, estimated to afflict one out of every 100 children in the country, damaging their hearts, is apparently inherited, Dr. May G. Wilson, Dr. Ralph E. Wheeler and Dr. Morton D. Schweitzer, of New York, reported.

The disease has long been known to run in families but they did not find, in their study of the condition in 112 families, that it was passed back and forth from case to case in the family as a contagious disease would be.

In families where one parent had rheumatic fever, the attack rate among the children was double that for families where neither parent had the disease. The attack rate was four times as great in families where both parents were rheumatic.

These figures are inconsistent with the

theory that the disease is contagious and give further evidence that hereditary susceptibility is the reason why the disease runs in families.

Science News Letter, June 22, 1940

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Where "Nerves" Originate

DON'T tell the woman with "nerves" to "snap out of it" or to "forget it". Her symptoms are real and just as distressing and frightening as they would be if a doctor injected into her veins a big dose of adrenalin or any other powerful drug. Recent discoveries of physiologists, Dr. Walter Alvarez, of the Mayo Clinic, told members of the American Medical Association, show that the symptoms complained of by the woman—or man for that matter—with nerves are due to erratic behavior of a "thermostatic center" in the brain.

This center is called the hypothalamus. Normally, it controls the involuntary nervous system and the glands of internal secretion. In turn, it is controlled by the thinking part of the brain. When this thermostat gets out of order, jitteriness, outbursts of anger, sleeplessness, and abnormal worrisomeness are likely to result. The reason is that "nervous storms" are going out along the involuntary nerves, at the ends of which are forged powerful chemical substances that have disturbing effects on most of the body. When the involuntary nervous system gets upset this way, it plays disconcerting tricks on the heart, blood vessels, digestive tract, kidneys and skin.

The thermostatic center can be upset by fatigue, insomnia and nervous strain, by disease and, in older persons, by little clots in the brain resulting from hardening of the arteries. As to the woman with nerves, Dr. Alvarez declared, "No one can blame her for being distressed and frightened and no well-informed person should even think of telling her to forget it or snap out of it."

Science News Letter, June 22, 1940

Stomach Ulcer Relief

A POWDER extracted from human body fluid which gave encouraging results in treatment of 60 stomach ulcer patients was on display at the meeting of the American Medical Association.

This promising new remedy for stomach ulcers was developed by Dr. David J. Sandweiss, Dr. M. H. F. Friedman, Dr. H. C. Saltzstein and Dr. A. A. Farbman,

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