

MEDICINE

Treatment for Cirrhosis

Liver extract gives cirrhosis patients new lease on life. Tissues are restored and weight is gained. Return of appetite is first sign of improvement.

► A NEW TREATMENT for cirrhosis of the liver which seems to give the patients a new lease on life by restoring their appetites is reported by Drs. Daniel H. Labby, Robert E. Shank, Henry G. Kunkel and the late Charles L. Hoagland of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (April 19).

The treatment consists of injections into the veins, two or three times a week, of a crude liver extract. The survival rate at the end of two years in the patients given this treatment was 77% compared with 45% among patients treated by diet and vitamin supplements and 22% to 25% among untreated patients.

All the patients were in what physicians term the "decompensated" stage of cirrhosis. They had either jaundice, hemorrhage, dropsy or fluid on the abdomen or a combination of these conditions. Of the 30 patients 21 were chronic alcoholic addicts.

One of the first signs of improvement in these seriously ill patients was a return of appetite, which in many cases had been practically nonexistent. At the same time they began to feel well and lost the tired feeling that many had complained of. They began to gain weight, wasted tissues being restored. The fluid on the abdomen disappeared in 12 of the 30 and another seven did not have to be tapped to withdraw the fluid nearly as often as before the start of treatment.

"In many instances such physical,

economic and social rehabilitation was accomplished that it was difficult to compare the state of apparent health during the course of treatment with the previous serious clinical state," the physicians report.

Five patients who had been treated from 10 to 18 months have been able to get along without treatment for from four to 15 months without relapsing.

The patients were required to abstain from alcohol but were not on a special diet. They were advised to eat foods high in protein, such as meat, cheese and eggs, and rich in starch and sugar. Vitamins were not given, except for short terms of vitamin B treatment for those with symptoms of a lack of this vitamin.

The increased appetite with consequent increase in food eaten and in weight gained and in vigor is believed the chief factor responsible for the patients' improvement.

The liver extract may also encourage rebuilding of the liver tissue and help restore to normal the various chemical processes that have gone wrong in the patient with cirrhosis. Further study is needed to show whether this is the case.

Science News Letter, April 26, 1947

CHEMISTRY

Light Energy Makes Rubber From Petroleum Compounds

► GREEN PLANTS still monopolize the secret of using sunlight to change carbon dioxide and water into food stuffs, but man seems on the threshold of performing a parallel chemical miracle by utilizing light to turn petroleum compounds into synthetic rubber. At the meeting of the American Chemical Society in Atlantic City, N. J., Prof. Keith J. Laidler of the Catholic University of America told of first steps in this direction, taken with the aid of metallic vapors that carry the energy of light to make the transformation.

The task which the light-energy is given to perform is the removal of hy-

drogen from the hydrocarbon molecules. If single hydrogen atoms are knocked out, free hydrocarbon groups remain that may combine into chemically useful long chains, or polymers. If the atomic twins that constitute hydrogen molecules are loosened, chemically active and industrially useful compounds known as olefins are formed.

The metals which Prof. Laidler has found most effective in his photochemical syntheses when used in vaporized form are zinc, cadmium and mercury. Nature of the reactions is strongly influenced by the color of the light used.

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ANTHROPOLOGY

Life Ended Below Forty In Turkey of Ancient Times

► LIFE DIDN'T begin at forty in ancient Turkey; as a rule, it ended then, or even earlier.

Dr. M. S. Senyurek of the University of Ankara, examining a collection of the skeletons of 120 Turks who lived between 1000 and 5200 years ago, found that three-fourths of these individuals had died before they reached their fortieth birthdays. Only seven got to be as old as 60.

Of those who lived beyond their thirtieth birthdays, the average age at death was 35 for men, 28 for women. The lower death-age for women is attributed to the hazards of childbirth.

Death rate was high among children: 25 of the group did not live to be 12 years old. Dr. Senyurek feels sure, too, that if skeletons of very young children had been preserved they would have indicated an even higher child death rate.

Details of the study are presented in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* (March).

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