

## MEDICINE

# From Now On: Chronic Ills

Obesity control will help to prevent many common chronic ailments. Screening tests will help detect the causes of future disease.

By WATSON DAVIS

*Fifteenth in a series of glances forward in science.*

➤ IN olden days there were so many catching diseases causing premature death that many people did not live long enough to have the chronic diseases.

But the chronic diseases have been with us a long time. The golden harvest of the patent medicine man of former years was reaped largely from those who suffered from the pains of "rhumatiz" and other forms of chronic bad health. Some of these ill is virtually wiped out by today's successful treatments for the infectious diseases and their after-effects. Others are still with us.

The complex of ill that may properly be labeled "chronic" make a gigantic drain on the nation. Dr. A. L. Chapman, chief of the U. S. Public Health Service's division on chronic disease, figures that this combination of diseases:

Causes a million deaths a year.

Fills five out of six of our hospital beds.

Steals a billion man-days of work each year.

Not all of the so-called chronic diseases are uncontrollable. Many of them, such as

malaria, pellagra, pernicious anemia, hay fever and asthma, the venereal diseases, epilepsy and diabetes, can be dealt with successfully by known methods.

One thing to do in handling the situation is to start early with the people while they are young, both to prevent later illness and to prepare for the inevitable difficulties of old age.

The medical profession and the public health experts have been so busy with the acutely ill in past years that they have had little time to work out the newer methods needed for the chronic ill.

Some of the practical experiments under way include:

A. Obesity control, because getting the excess fat off of people helps prevent hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and even cancer and arthritis. The aim is not to reduce weight alone but give motivation to maintain the weight loss.

B. Attempting to discover hidden causes of future disease by screening tests, not for just one disease, but for all that can be picked up early. Tests of this are being made in Indianapolis and Boston.

C. Communities are attempting to reduce the cost of chronic diseases by better methods of home care and rehabilitation.

Science News Letter, July 8, 1950

## MEDICINE

# Pain-Killer for Heart

➤ THE local anesthetic which dentists use as a pain-killer has been converted by chemical modification into a powerful new drug for certain kinds of heart trouble.

Complete success with the drug in treating 13 of 15 patients and partial success in two was reported by Drs. Herbert J. Kayden, Lester C. Mark, J. Murray Steele and Bernard B. Brodie of New York University-Bellevue Medical Center at the meeting of the American Heart Association.

The new drug is called procaine amide. The parent drug is procaine, or novocain as it is also known. Procaine amide will be made immediately available on prescription under the trade name of Pronestyl.

The drug abolishes irregular rhythms of the heart known as ventricular tachycardias. Tachycardias are palpitations in layman's language. When they occur in the ventricles of the heart they are a most serious disturbance because of the ever present possibility of ventricular fibrillation developing. This last condition is one in which the fibers of

the heart muscle twitch separately and irregularly instead of all together. It may be fatal.

Procaine amide was made, along with a number of other related chemicals, after scientists had found that procaine injected into a vein abolished the extra heart beats which frequently occur during operations under anesthesia.

Procaine, however, is very quickly destroyed in the body and cannot be given by vein injection to conscious patients because it stimulates the central nervous system violently, even giving rise to convulsions.

Search for a drug without these disadvantages but with procaine's effect on the heart led to procaine amide.

The new drug acts quickly and can also be given by mouth. It is more powerful and less toxic than quinidine, drug now used for ventricular tachycardia.

Besides being effective in this condition, procaine amide will abolish the frequently annoying extra heart beats that have their

origin in the ventricle of the heart. Though annoying, these extra heartbeats are not dangerous, but they often cause anxiety in those who have them.

Science News Letter, July 8, 1950

## MEDICINE

# Film Teaches Women to Examine Selves for Cancer

➤ A NEW and very personal way in which American women can actively fight cancer has been devised. It consists of a motion picture film designed to teach them how to examine their own breasts each month for early signs of cancer.

"Within the next few years, breast cancer may be reduced as a national problem," is the hope for the film expressed by Dr. Austin V. Deibert, chief of the U. S. National Cancer Institute cancer control branch.

The National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society are co-producers of the film. It was shown for the first time to physicians and newspaper writers at the meeting in San Francisco of the American Medical Association. Plans are to distribute it throughout the country for showing to women's organizations.

Of the 50,000 women who develop breast cancer each year, more than half are doomed to die within five years of diagnosis because the disease is not recognized until it reaches an advanced stage, Dr. Charles S. Cameron, medical and scientific director of the American Cancer Society, states.

Between 80% and 90% of these deaths could be prevented, he reports, if women themselves recognized the early stages of breast cancer.

Tumors as small as a half inch in diameter can be detected by the simple, four-step technique of breast examination taught in the film.

Science News Letter, July 8, 1950

## METEOROLOGY

# East Cooler Than Normal, West Warmer in July

➤ THE weather will be good to the East during July—not so good to the area west of the Mississippi.

The Weather Bureau's 30-day outlook predicts that temperatures east of the Mississippi will be below normal, and quite a bit below normal in the center of that area. In addition, substantial showery rainfalls are predicted during the month for the same region, especially in the southeast and along the Atlantic seaboard.

The nation's dustbowl area is in for a month of subnormal rainfall. This is also true for the rest of the country west of the Mississippi. This will be accompanied by higher than normal temperatures, except for the Pacific coast where normal temperatures are expected.

Science News Letter, July 8, 1950