

PSYCHIATRY

Mental First Aid

Trailers equipped for emergency treatment of psychological casualties and mobile laundries to provide glass-free clothing are urged to prevent panic in atomic attack.

► TRAILER first-aid stations for emergency treatment of mental casualties and mobile laundries to provide clean clothing and blankets were urged by Dr. Kurt Fantl, psychiatrist of Los Angeles, as means of preventing panic in case of atom bomb attack. (AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY, January)

These first-aid trailers should be equipped to provide restraint for acute cases as well as quick sedation to quiet over-strained nerves, Dr. Fantl said.

We do not know what to expect in the way of panic among Americans in case of atomic bombing, he explained. In England, under wartime bombing, panic was much less of a problem than was anticipated.

But in Japan also there was no panic until the atom bomb was used. The Japanese, like the English, got used to bombing. They would not even seek shelter but would go about their work as usual—until the atom bomb dropped. After that, any light or spark suggesting the light flash of the explosion, or any noise even resembling that of an airplane would send them bolting for shelter. It got so that they didn't sleep, didn't eat, and were unable to work.

Panic may be prevented before disaster strikes by providing adequate shelters and lighting them with flashlights, and by education. The education should be provided carefully so that it will not create the panic it is intended to prevent. Informing the public of dangers without a master plan to help each individual to find an active place in the defense may actually create panic, Dr. Fantl pointed out.

After disaster strikes, panic prevention involves first of all a known reliable information source. Sound trucks or small planes equipped with loud speakers might be utilized for this purpose. In addition to instant treatment of psychological breakdowns, Dr. Fantl urges the following means for strengthening morale in a bombed area.

1. Uniformed civilian defense members to appear on the scene as quickly as possible. Experience in England has shown that the mere presence of a person in authority was often enough to create confidence.

2. Mobile laundry units. After a bombing people's laundry is generally full of glass splinters and grime. In case of atomic bombing it might be contaminated with radioactive materials.

3. Mobile kitchens and hot food are a proven medicine against shakiness.

In case children are evacuated from target areas, it should be done with care, Dr.

Fantl emphasized. During the last war, psychiatric disturbance was greater among evacuated children than among the bombed children, he said. Evacuation should be planned for in advance.

People who have relatives and friends in safe areas should take their children to visit there, he suggests. Parents should stay overnight with the children at first and then should get them used to spending the night away from home without their mothers so that in case evacuation should become necessary, separation from the parents and home would not be so terrifying.

For those children who have no relatives or friends in safe areas, the aid should be enlisted of those with camping and child care experience such as Boy Scout and Campfire leaders.

Care of the aged should also be planned in advance of disaster. One of the chief difficulties in handling old people is their re-

luctance to move and their slowness which interferes with rescue operations.

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ZOOLOGY

Rare Amphibians Have No Eyes or Legs

► RARE, eel-like amphibians without eyes and without legs, called Caecilians, are among the 1,400 specimens just received from Venezuela at the University of Illinois' Natural History Museum. They were collected last summer by two graduate students on an expedition into a little explored part of the South American nation.

The Caecilians look like foot-long earthworms, but actually are relatives of the frogs. They were caught with fish-hooks in the Orinoco river. They are rare in any collection because they burrow deep in the ground or swim below the surface of the water and seldom come up.

Also in the collection are fish-eating bats, which scoop up small fish in the folds of their tails, and sloths.

The two Americans—W. Leslie Burger, Frederick, Md., and Lowell S. Miller, Provo, Utah—travelled 3,000 miles by every means of transportation through Venezuela in their search for the mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

Science News Letter, January 27, 1951



PRECISION—A specialist in the new Measurements Laboratory of the General Electric Meter and Instrument Divisions at Lynn, Mass., adjusts a spring in a small panel instrument.