

Senate Committee Investigates Cancer

Medicine

By FLORA G. ORR

Cancer, rapidly becoming the most menacing danger to life of all persons over 45 years of age, is to receive the spotlight of congressional attention this fall.

The result, confidently expected, is that a continuous program of financial support for research work on the nature and cause of this disease will be drawn up in the form of an authorization bill. That such a bill would pass both houses of Congress with little debate is scarcely questioned.

The Senate Commerce Committee is undertaking, at the request of the Senate, an investigation into all means and methods whereby the Federal Government can be of help in working towards a solution of this serious health problem. It is to report its findings and make recommendations for legislation and appropriations.

As a first step, Senator Wesley Jones, chairman of the committee, has written to several leading physicians, surgeons, physicists, chemists and radiologists who attended, more than a year ago, a cancer conference in Washington called by Surgeon General Hugh Cumming of the U. S. Public Health Service.

Each of these men has been asked whether he agrees with a report drawn up by a sub-committee of that conference. This report particularly recommends a long program of research work into the nature and cause of cancer, and calls attention to the fact that lack of financial support has kept the world back in learning vital facts about the nature of this disease. It also states that there should be improvement in surgery and light-ray treatment technique.

Excellent work toward improvement in treating the disease, however, the report says, is being done in every well-equipped hospital in the country. Not all experts whose work has to do with cancer agree with that particular portion of the report, however.

Undoubtedly, the report recommends, the U. S. Public Health Service should be enabled to develop a

group of scientific workers who would give their lives to cancer research. The especial lines of work which seem to be indicated at the present time, would be research work on the general biochemistry of the cell and considerable work in the standardization of X-ray and radium radiation.

Relative to the nature of the cancer cell, many scientists who now feel that they are groping in the dark, believe that if normal cells and cancer cells could be grown side by side, long experimentation might show some form of chemical or physical treatment which would destroy the cancer cells, but leave the healthy cells untouched. Many others, however, are pessimistic with regard to the possibility of ever finding any such treatment.

Dr. Francis Carter Wood of the Columbia University Institute of Cancer Research, in writing to Senator Jones, pointed out how the existing Government bureau can contribute to the program of cancer research.

"If Congress should decide to support this research work, I think the work should be done in already established institutes," wrote Dr. Wood, "preferably those already existing as a part of the machinery of the government."

The Bureau of Standards laboratories could undertake the work of discovering practical methods for the use of radium and X-ray, he says; the

Bureau of the Census for obtaining and tabulating statistical reports; and the Public Health Service for other laboratory studies.

The work of standardizing X-ray and radium is now proceeding at the Bureau of Standards, but in order to finish it up quickly, the Bureau undoubtedly needs more help and more money and more apparatus.

"The Public Health Service aspect of the question is in some ways the most vital," Dr. Wood continued. "It would be advisable to have a corps of experts there to work on the problem. A far-seeing program should be arranged, in order to avoid wasting funds, and continuous support will be required.

"It may take two or three years to collect an expert staff in cancer research and train them. Very few such men are available in this country and in fact anywhere in the world, and the best quality of men will not devote themselves to such work unless there is strong evidence that their salaries and opportunities will continue over a period of years.

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Cecropia

Entomology

A noble exception to the rule that beautiful things are rare is found in the cecropia moth, illustrated on our front cover. It is one of the most common of the larger moths, yet one of the most beautiful. Now that cooler weather has come, many persons who do not ordinarily seek insects will find cecropias coming ready to hand, stupefied by the first touches of frost. By the same token, museum entomologists will be more or less pestered by the offers of well-meaning but uninformed persons who have made one of these chance captures and imagine that they have something convertible into cash. The cecropia is like the sunset, priceless beautiful but worth nothing in terms of cash.

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