

MEDICINE

Premature Births Cut

► BIRTH OF PREMATURE infants was prevented in 43% of 156 mothers who were given a muscle-relaxing drug called isoxsuprine, Dr. Edward H. Bishop of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine has reported.

Obstetricians all too often accept premature births as an inevitability, he told an American Medical Association meeting in New York.

"This seeming indifference," he said, "may be nurtured by the fact that this complication does not threaten the life of the mother." But premature labor has no peer as a threat to the welfare of the unborn child, he added.

Major obstetric complications include toxemia, hemorrhage and infection, and advances are being made in the treatment of these conditions. Some investigators have reported studies showing that inadequate nutrition and small heart size in the mother are contributing causes to premature labor.

However, Dr. Bishop pointed out, the vast majority of premature infants are born of apparently normal mothers after an apparently normal prenatal course. Until the causes of premature labor are clarified, he said, symptoms must be treated.

The onset of uterine contractions is usually what alerts the obstetrician to the danger of premature birth. In the 156 patients

with whom Dr. Bishop worked during a two-year period, pregnancy had advanced from 20 to 36 weeks and usually the membranes had not ruptured, inasmuch as he believes there is some question regarding the wisdom and safety of putting off delivery under these circumstances.

Initial dosage by intravenous route consisted of 30 milligrams of isoxsuprine diluted in 200 cubic centimeters of five percent glucose in water and administered at the rate of 40 to 50 drops a minute.

Afterward, Dr. Bishop administered 10 milligrams of the drug intramuscularly every three hours. Then after the first 24 hours of treatment, the medication was given either orally or intramuscularly depending on the uterine activity.

Once uterine contractions had stopped for 48 hours, the patient was usually discharged from the hospital and a maintenance dose of 10 milligrams four times a day orally was continued for at least two weeks.

No effect on labor was achieved in 25% of the cases studied. A temporary cessation of labor followed by a recurrence after a short period of time occurred in 11.5%. In a third group of patients, recurrence of premature labor was delayed for one week or longer, but still resulted in delivery of an infant weighing less than five pounds.

However, Dr. Bishop believes that delay

was worthwhile through allowing more time for fetal growth in the ideal environment and thereby increasing the chance of survival.

• Science News Letter, 80:39 July 15, 1961

PUBLIC HEALTH

Stagger Housework Before It Staggers You

► THE SO-CALLED efficient housewife got no praise from Dr. Janet Travell, personal physician to President Kennedy, when she told YWCA health and recreation leaders in Washington, D. C., how to keep from straining their backs at household tasks.

"The more efficient you are, the worse you will come out," Dr. Travell warned, explaining that the woman who does all her ironing on one day would do better to iron 15 minutes for five days.

The President's physician advised a rhythm of movement, and the avoidance of speed. Housework can be done like a modern dance, she said, with frequent rests of two to five minutes. "There really is a limit to what you can do."

Other advice from Dr. Travell:

Better make two trips to the market than carry one bundle that will overreach your strength.

Do not tolerate bad physical or mechanical arrangements in your home. If the sink is too high, use a stool or chair.

Take a variety of exercise to avoid overuse of a special set of muscles.

Exercise should be fun. If you cannot take much exercise, use a well-proportioned rocking chair. (It was Dr. Travell who recommended a rocking chair for President Kennedy.)

Pace yourself. Do not kill yourself doing housework. Be a homemaker instead of a houseworker.

Take your own advice about what you should do to avoid fat or fatigue. You know you need more exercise and less food.

The doctor's dilemma is not in choosing between wonder drugs but in getting people to do what they know is good for them.

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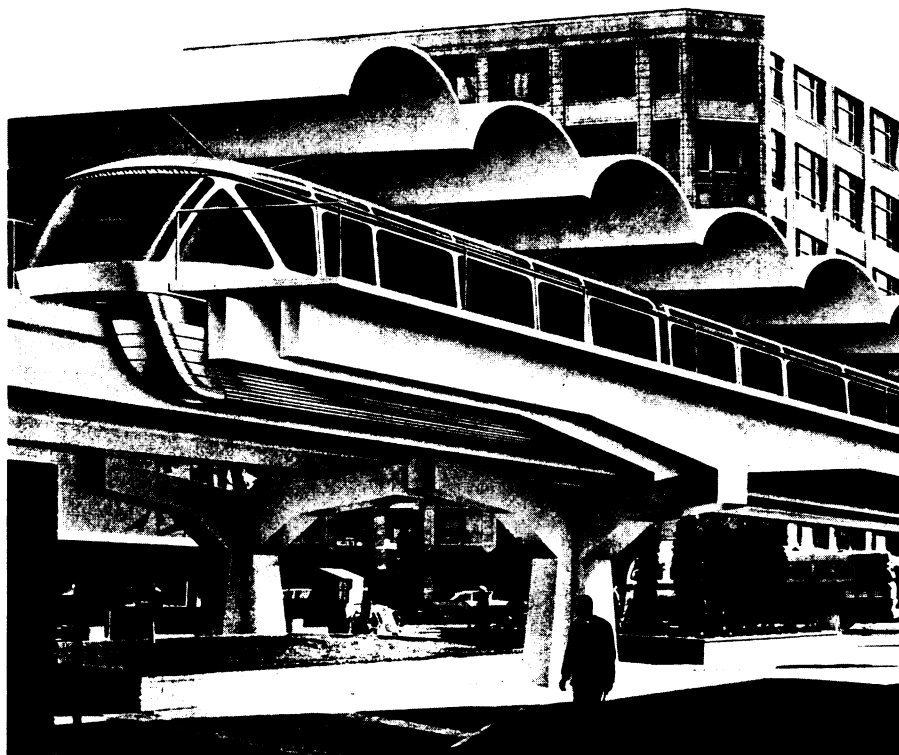
Water Pollution Increasing in Europe

► EUROPE, like the United States, has a water pollution problem. Such world-famous beautiful rivers as the Rhine in Germany are receiving increasing amounts of industrial wastes, triggered by the post-war industrial boom in Europe.

European scientists are currently working on the problem to see if they can cut down the dirtying of the waters, Dr. Sherman W. Gillam of the U. S. Department of Interior's office of saline water reported.

No extensive work on de-salting the oceans is being conducted in Western Europe because of the abundant fresh-water supply, Dr. Gillam noted. However, Algiers, on the African coast, is currently working on solar evaporation in conjunction with French scientists and engineers.

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HIGH-SPEED MONORAIL—10,000 passengers an hour can be carried on a 95-second schedule along a 1.2-mile monorail track that will be built from downtown Seattle, Wash., to the Century 21 Exposition in 1962. The downtown terminal with one of the train's electric Alweg monorail cars is sketched above.