

SURGERY

Relieves Unbearable Pain

► **SURGICAL RELIEF** of unbearable pain in cancer, neuralgia and other conditions that do not respond to medication was reported at the second International Congress of Neurological Surgery in Washington, D.C. Precise surgery also was shown to correct the tremors of shaking palsy (Parkinson's disease) and to stop the jerks of epilepsy.

A more refined technique of precisely locating the area causing the violent jerks of epilepsy was reported in a laboratory film and an interview with Prof. Marcel David of St. Anne's Hospital, Paris, France. Prof. David described the meticulous form of surgery (stereotaxy) performed in selective brain areas that are destroyed in order to enable patients to lead more normal lives.

In the famous operating room at St. Anne's neurosurgeons from all over the world watch the procedures. A whole series of electrodes are introduced and the exact point is found for destruction. A tiny pellet of yttrium (radioactive metal) is then introduced to destroy an area of two millimeters in size.

Dr. James C. White, emeritus professor of surgery at Harvard University and from the neurosurgical laboratories at the Massachusetts General Hospital, reported on work done with an electrical current used to relieve the pain of patients with incurable cancer without causing major psychological damage.

The old method of lobotomy destroyed

much of the brain, but when used on mental patients the problem was not as severe as in normal minds. The ensuing deterioration in personality among normal persons has made the operation unpopular until now.

• Science News Letter, 80:300 November 4, 1961

Radioisotopes Used

Diagnostic and therapeutic uses of radioisotopes were discussed at the International Congress of Neurological Surgery in Washington. Advantages of early detection and accuracy in determining locations of lesions were stressed by Dr. Therese Planiol of Paris, France, who reported on studies with 1,800 patients following experimental work with animals.

Dr. Jean Talairach, also of Paris, said the use of radioactive isotopes had been successful in treating cerebral tumors as well as "functional neurosurgery." Radioactive gold or the metal yttrium was implanted in tissue that was to be destroyed.

In the opening discussion Dr. Cornelius A. Tobias of the Donner Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, told of pituitary gland irradiation for advanced cases of cancer, for diabetes with vascular disease and for acromegaly (a disease in which excess secretion of growth hormone is caused by the pituitary gland).

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MEDICINE

Treating Incurables

► **THE AGE-OLD PROBLEM** of whether a doctor should let a dying patient pass away instead of prolonging his life with treatment is a legal rather than a medical responsibility, a doctor at the Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research, New York, said.

"The doctor's job is to keep a patient alive as long as he can," Dr. David A. Karnofsky told the American Cancer Society's scientific session.

Dr. Karnofsky said that not only do patients expect to be treated as long as they can respond to treatment, but the doctor himself can learn a great deal that will be of value to other patients.

When patients and their families object to further treatment in advanced cases of cancer they should no longer use the hospital's facilities, the speaker said.

"A hospital is a place where active treatment is given, and not a custodial institution," he added. "Patients should be transferred to nursing homes if treatment is not to be continued."

Many communities, however, face a real problem in not having adequate facilities to care for incurable patients as well as those who could be cured. In such cases,

Dr. Karnofsky said, they should develop better facilities, not turn the dying patients out without further treatment.

Asked by **SCIENCE SERVICE** if experimental treatment should be used on a dying patient by a physician who would not use such radical therapy on one who had a chance to recover, Dr. Karnofsky said "only if the patient requests it and the doctor is qualified."

"I believe it is wrong to experiment unless the experiment serves a useful purpose," he said.

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MEDICINE

TB Drug Has Been Found To Prevent the Disease

► **A TUBERCULOSIS** drug widely used to treat the disease has been found 80% effective in preventing it.

The drug, isoniazid, was used on 12,000 persons who were in constant contact with newly discovered TB cases, Dr. Luther L. Terry, Surgeon General of the U. S. Public Health Service, reported.

Daily doses of isoniazid were taken by

the subjects under medical supervision during a period when the risk of getting the disease is normally very high. It is not known, however, if the protection from the drug will last. The people studied will be observed for several years to see whether or not the protection continues.

The Health Service also found that of each 1,000 persons contacted in connection with new TB cases, 19 examined had the disease. This rate is about 30 times as high as that found by X-ray surveys and shows the value of examining those in contact with newly discovered TB cases.

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