

SURGERY

Over-Surgery Questioned

► CHANCES OF BREAST cancer cure are probably best when only the primary tumor is removed, provided the regional nodes have not yet been affected, the American Medical Association was told in New York.

Dr. George Crile, cancer surgeon of the Cleveland (Ohio) Clinic Foundation, contradicted an old maxim calling for big operations, or radical mastectomy, for small breast cancers, and small operations, or simple mastectomy, for extensive breast cancers.

The rapidly advancing science of immunology has shown that the opposite may be true because "removal of uninvolved regional nodes that drain small tumors may lower the patient's immunologic resistance" to the implantation and growth of distant spreading, or metastasis.

Regressions of human cancer occasionally occur, he pointed out as one argument against destroying the lymph nodes by surgery or radiation when they do not contain spreading cancer cells.

Large cancers and the nodes to which they have spread should be removed rather than treated palliatively by relatively small operations, he believes. Radical removal of these large cancers and the affected lymph nodes may prolong life, promote comfort, or even be of curative value in raising the patient's resistance to spread of the cancer, he declared.

To prove whether preventative removal

of uninvolved lymph nodes is beneficial or harmful, Dr. Crile suggested that surgeons plan a carefully designed, cooperative study of patient survival after conservative and radical breast surgery.

Another speaker warned of misdiagnosis of emphysema, a lung disease that has increased in all parts of the United States. The national concern for the estimated 10 million persons suffering from this disease has led to over-concern and over-diagnosis, Dr. Theodore H. Noehren, associate professor of internal medicine at the State University of New York, Buffalo, said.

A person who appears to his physician to be a "pink puffer," or victim of emphysema, may really be a "hyperventilator," which means abnormally prolonged, rapid breathing. "Pink puffer" is a British term describing certain patients with emphysema, which is a chronic disease in which air is retained in lung tissue.

Wrong diagnosis could be serious because emphysema and hyperventilation require different forms of treatment. Simple laboratory tests will show the difference.

Hyperventilators react to fear or other strong emotions by overbreathing, sometimes blaming their shortness of breath on emphysema or some other disease. Emphysema is a popular diagnosis, not only with self-diagnosing patients but with many physicians as well.

A Texas exhibitor, Dr. Everett R. Veirs,

of the Scott and White Clinic, Temple, demonstrated how a hand-held hair dryer may be more effective than cauterizing or drugs for a virus infection of the eye called herpes simplex keratitis.

Herpes simplex, the virus responsible for cold sores, can cause severe discomfort and even blindness when it infects the eye, Dr. Veirs explained. Once an infection is established in the eye it tends to recur, causing more permanent scarring with each flareup. The antiviral drug IDU, or 5-iodo-2-deoxyuridine, has recently replaced cauterization of the involved cornea.

The hand-held dryer method applies dry hot air to infected eyes for about five minutes. Dry air heated to 140 to 143.6 degrees F. is used, since laboratory tests show that the virus is sensitive to heat above 132.8 degrees. The treatment has been used at the clinic since 1959 with success.

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Delay Medicare Action

► THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, at its 114th annual convention, adopted a resolution delaying direct action on Medicare until after Congressional action has been completed.

Amendments to the resolution stated that it should not be interpreted as a contradiction of the AMA code of ethics provision which says that a doctor should not render services under conditions impairing free exercise of his medical judgment or causing deterioration in quality of medical care.

The Medicare measure would provide hospital and nursing home care for those over 65 under an expanded social security.

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MEDICINE

Forget About Cholesterol

► FORGET ABOUT cholesterol and concentrate on other kinds of fats called triglycerides, a Philadelphia professor of medicine told the 114th annual convention of the American Medical Association.

High triglyceride levels in the blood are a common feature of coronary disease, high blood pressure and gout, said Dr. Donald Berkowitz of Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital. This may explain the frequency of diabetes along with these diseases. Impairment of glucose tolerance, which is present in diabetes, accompanies high levels of triglyceride.

This is now a technique for measuring triglycerides, but because it is not as easy as the cholesterol test, it is not given routinely. The test is certain to become more common as research proves its importance, Dr. Berkowitz believes.

"Diabetes may actually be a metabolic complication of abnormal triglyceride metabolism rather than a primary disease," he stated. "Diabetes is the result, not the cause of high triglycerides."

The drug cytomel, or l-triiodothyronine, shown in an exhibit by Dr. Berkowitz to make obese patients attain more normal free fatty acid metabolism, is being studied further at Hahnemann.

"Cytomel may also help carbohydrate

metabolism," he told SCIENCE SERVICE. "The relationship of the triglycerides to carbohydrate metabolism has received but little attention."

A 67-year-old physician who walks about six miles a day to keep his heart from falling prey to inactivity told a news conference that college graduates who are starting desk jobs would do well to exercise on a bicycle machine.

Dr. William Dock of the Brooklyn, N.Y., Veterans Administration Hospital said a person's heart begins to age when he is between 15 and 20 years old. Autopsies have shown accumulation of inert brown granules in hearts of persons that young. As one grows older there is more atrophy of muscle and more accumulation of the brown granules that appear to replace the important microsomes and mitochondria that power the heart.

Very few hearts fail without some evidence of disease, he said, and the aged heart will respond to treatment almost as successfully as the younger heart.

The retired person who feels frustrated and angry is in danger of a fatal heart attack. Quiet, steady exercise and a good philosophy benefit the aging heart.

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PHYSIOLOGY

Avoid Pregnancy After Breast Cancer Surgery

► WOMEN who have had a cancerous breast removed should avoid pregnancy for three years. They should not, however, use birth control pills containing the female sex hormone estrogen, the American Cancer Society's 1965 scientific meeting in Philadelphia was told.

The reason for this is that some breast cancers are hormone-dependent, Dr. Edward F. Lewison of the Johns Hopkins Hospital breast clinic, Baltimore, said. He explained that there is a lack of understanding of specific differences in hormone effects on breast tumor.

Ovarian hormones are believed to have a profound effect upon the natural history of some hormone-sensitive breast cancers. This is the reason that many surgeons remove the ovaries after breast cancer surgery, but there is a difference of opinion among surgeons as to whether the operation should be used as a prevention of cancer spread or as a treatment when the cancer actually metastasizes, Dr. Lewison said.

"There is no doubt that therapeutic castration is of value in patients with advanced, recurrent or metastatic breast cancer," Dr. Lewison stated. He does not advise ovary removal, or oophorectomy, as a preventive of spreading, however.

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