

PUBLIC HEALTH

Surgeon General Defends National Health Program

Plan Seeks to Reduce Volume of Illness By Giving Preventive Medical Services to All Areas and People

A DEFENSE of the National Health Program and specific answers to various criticisms of it were issued by Surgeon General Thomas Parran, U. S. Public Health Service, in an address, read for him, to the National Conference of Social Work in Buffalo.

"The National Health Program," in Dr. Parran's words, "represents the most comprehensive approach ever made towards solving the diverse and serious problems retarding our nation's health."

Seek to Reduce Sickness

Its objectives, he declared, are to reduce the volume of sickness and ill health by extending preventive services to all areas and people, to provide for construction and maintenance of hospitals where needed and for support of existing hospitals, to reduce disability and lengthen life by more prompt and adequate medical care of the sick, to extend indirect health protection to the worker and his family by compensation for wages lost through nonindustrial sickness and accident, and to promote greater federal effort on research in prevention and cure of diseases not now controllable.

"It is not proposed that the health and medical services of the country be federalized," Dr. Parran explained. He pointed out the need today for "group cooperative action in the rendering of medical service no less than in payment for it" and warned against standardization and creation of vested interests that would resist future change.

"The national health program does not recommend a national system of compulsory health insurance nor does it require nor coerce the states to do so," he said in answer to the charge that the national health program would lead to such a system.

To criticism of the estimated expense of the national health program, he pointed out that this amounts to a "per capita daily expenditure of one and seven-eighths cents on the average for each of us."

"Much of the opposition on the part of many people, doctors, and patients alike, to any great extension of public

medical service arises," he said, "because the public medical service now provided in so many communities is of such inferior quality. A similar distrust arises from the untrained, political health officer who still is cherished in so many of our communities . . ."

"The greatest contribution that you social workers can make to future sound progress in national health is by doing a better job in the provision of medical service for which you are now legally responsible."

Dr. Parran answered the charge that our present low death rate shows that we do not need a national health program by saying:

"The death rates alone you must remember are not a measure of national fitness. They do not reveal the estimated 250,000 people who are suffering from silicosis, nor the 90,000 to 100,000 cases of pellagra which occurred last year in the South, nor the recent epidemic of scurvy in Maine."

Science News Letter, July 8, 1939

MEDICINE

Sulfanilamide's Success Depends on Oxygen Effects

THE MYSTERY of how sulfapyridine and sulfanilamide cure pneumonia and other serious ailments has been practically solved and as a result scientists at Washington University School of Medicine are now starting to make drugs of quite different chemical composition which they hope will be even more effective remedies for human diseases.

The secret of sulfanilamide's success in curing disease depends, Prof. Philip A. Shaffer reports (*Science*, June 16) on what it does with oxygen picked up, not from the air you breathe, but from the cells in your body.

Other chemicals that do a better germ-killing job through this same mechanism can probably be found, Prof. Shaffer predicts.

Discovery of what sulfanilamide and sulfapyridine do with oxygen to cure disease also explains why they sometimes

cause poisoning symptoms in the patient. These drugs, Prof. Shaffer explains, provide "a mechanism by which the sterilizing oxidation intensity of molecular oxygen is applied nearly at its maximum to bacteria and unavoidably also to some extent to host cells."

Science News Letter, July 8, 1939

MEDICINE

Meningotoxoid a Possible Weapon Against Meningitis

A TOXOID against meningitis, something like the toxoid now used to protect children against diphtheria, has been developed by Dr. Talat Vasfi Oz of the State Institute of Hygiene at Ankara, Turkey.

When given to humans as well as when given to experimental animals, the new meningotoxoid caused formation of antibodies in the blood, Dr. Oz reports (*Science*, June 23). Antibodies are substances which fight invading disease germs. He does not, however, report any tests of the toxoid's ability to protect either humans or animals against injections of meningitis germs (meningococci) or exposure to the disease.

The toxoid is made by formaldehyde and alum treatment of a toxin which Dr. Oz reports having obtained from meningococci, the round germs which are the cause of epidemic meningitis.

Meningitis at present is fought by a serum or by the new chemical remedy, sulfanilamide, or a combination of the two. These act by fighting the germs. Toxoids and antitoxins, on the other hand, act to neutralize the toxin or poison produced by germs. The question of whether or not the meningococci produce a true toxin, as diphtheria germs do, has not yet been settled to the satisfaction of scientists generally.

Science News Letter, July 8, 1939

Temperatures of 120 degrees are common in Death Valley, California, in summer.

Like putting salt on a bird's tail, putting vinegar on an octopus' back is supposed to make it lose its grip.

● RADIO ●

A. E. Demaray, associate director of the National Park Service, will be the guest scientist on "Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over the coast to coast network of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Monday, July 17, 5:45 EDST, 4:45 EST, 3:45 CST, 2:45 MST, 1:45 PST. Listen in on your local station. Listen in each Monday.