

MEDICINE

Cut Child Cancer Deaths

Early recognition and treatment can save many young children from this killer. Period of greatest mortality is from birth to the fifth year.

► TOO many babies and children are dying needlessly of cancer. Many could be saved by early recognition and treatment, Dr. Harold W. Dargeon of Memorial Hospital, New York, declares in a report in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Feb. 14).

A constantly hopeless attitude when cancer is discovered in a child is "not justified," he states.

From birth to five years is the age period when the largest number of cancer deaths occur in children. It is also the period when a large number of curable cancers in children are found.

The family doctor is the key person in the fight to cut child cancer deaths, Dr. Dargeon declares. It is the family doctor who is first consulted about a child's bruises and bumps, his unusual growth or failure to grow, his problem behavior and his vague illnesses which might be early signs of cancer. His opinion and advice are the basis for the family's decisions.

Cancer, leukemia and other tumors have become such great killers of children that in the past 10 years they exceeded almost all common diseases among the causes of death in certain age groups during childhood.

In New York, Dr. Dargeon reports, these diseases and Hodgkin's disease killed 392 children during 1942, 1943 and 1944. During the same three years, tuberculosis killed 291, meningitis 150, whooping cough 154, infantile paralysis 86, syphilis 55, measles 35, and scarlet fever 17.

The six places in the body where cancer most often attacks in childhood are: the bones, the kidneys, the eye and eye socket, the lymphatic and blood-forming organs, the soft tissues such as muscle and fat, and the nervous system.

Proper treatment for cancer in children is now offered in many parts of the country, Dr. Dargeon states.

"The current necessity is for greater attention to earlier diagnosis."

Children should have health examinations every month from birth to one year of age, every three months from one to six years and twice a year thereafter, as part of the fight to detect and remove

curable cancer. These examinations, Dr. Dargeon says, should include X-rays of the chest and a complete blood count in addition to other pediatric routines.

Investigation and repeated investigation should be made, he stresses, in the case of a child who has symptoms not quite typical of a common disease, or who is precocious or retarded, especially if the departure from the norm has been increasingly apparent or if he has periodic vague illnesses with periods of normal health between attacks.

Unusual growth or retardation of growth of the body as a whole or some member of it should suggest to the doctor the possible presence of a tumor.

The child who is a behavior problem may also have a tumor or cancer.

Tumors other than cancer should not be taken lightly.

Any tumor, whether cancerous or not, may cause death if its size, rapidity of growth, location or interference with function seriously disturbs vital activities, Dr. Dargeon warns. Most striking examples of benign, that is, non-cancerous, tumors which are very serious are those within the head. They involve such important structures that, though for the most part not cancerous, they may result in high mortality.

Science News Letter, February 21, 1948

MEDICINE

Vitamin E Relieves Pain Caused by Knots in Feet

► TRY large doses of vitamin E, before resorting to surgery, for patients with painful knots of tissue on the soles of the feet, Dr. J. Vernon Luck of Los Angeles advised fellow orthopedic surgeons in Chicago.

The condition is called plantar fascia, or Dupuytren's contracture. When it occurs on the palms of the hands it is called palmar fascia.

When the disease affects the palm of a hand there is a drawing down of the fingers into the palm. This condition, common in middle aged and elderly men, is due to a thin, tough tissue between the skin and muscles and tendons, or leaders, of the palm.

The patient becomes unable to straighten one or more of his fingers, noticing at the same time the appearance of small, tumorlike masses and cords of very hard tissue beneath the skin of his palm.

"In the foot condition, knots of tissue and cords develop in the sole, similar to those that develop in the hand," Dr. Luck said. "It is very rare, however, that the toes are drawn down in the manner that the fingers are flexed into the palm. The knot-like structures in the sole often have been mistaken for cancerous tumors. In other cases the true condition was not recognized and the patients were treated with arch supports without benefit.

"Treatment in the past has been chiefly surgical, particularly for the hand lesions.

"Treatment of the feet also has been surgical, but in recent years several investigators have obtained good results with large doses of vitamin E. The patients have been relieved of pain, but the treatment actually affords little relief of the contractures."

Science News Letter, February 21, 1948



MIDGET ELECTRIC MOTOR—
World's smallest, this pygmy power plant is so tiny that a half-dozen fit comfortably in a lady's thimble. Called an "Electrotor," it is 3/16 of an inch in length and diameter, weighs less than a gram, requires 1½ volts, and runs with high efficiency at 7,000 r.p.m. It is one of a series of sub-miniature motors invented by J. V. and J. E. G. Eurich, brothers, of Lancashire, England and will be manufactured in this country.