

The Medical Roundup

by

Walter Alvarez

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

The National Foundation-March of Dimes (800 Second ave., New York 17) has just prepared a good article on systemic lupus erythematosus. Lupus in Latin means a wolf, and this suggests that the disease tends to "eat away" parts of the body. Erythema means redness, which refers to the appearance of the skin.

This rare disease is a miserable one in which the weird symptoms tend to keep coming back at intervals. It is an inflammatory disease affect-

ing the so-called connective or gristle-like tissues of the body. Systemic lupus erythematosus—called SLE for short—is one of the so-called collagen diseases. Collagen refers to the tough, gristle-like tissues of the body. Other collagen diseases are polyarteritis nodosa, a nodular inflammation in some of the arteries of the body; another in scleroderma in which the skin becomes dense and hard and thick. Another is dermatomyositis, which means an inflammation of the skin and the muscles under it; others are rheumatic fever and rheumatoid arthritis.

As I said, SLE is a disease in which flare-ups tend to come every so often. For a while, only one or two organs may seem to be affected. Often, the joints are painful. There may come periods in which the disease leaves the patient alone, or it may keep bothering the victim for years in either a mild or a severe form. Occasionally it may become so acute that it quickly endangers the patient's life. It may come at any time of life, but usually it begins in the person's twenties or thirties. Most of the patients are women. The most serious symptoms are likely to be due to disease in the kidneys or in the heart. Dangerous infections may come along. In many cases, especially at first, the disease can be so puzzling that, for a while, the diagnosis will be missed. In many of these unrecognized cases, the symptoms will be mild.

Cause Not Known

The cause of SLE is not known. Some experts suspect that it is due to a sort of allergy to the person's own tissues. It doesn't appear to be due to an infection with either

bacteria or viruses, but it could be. It is possible that, at times, the disease is inherited.

It often is hard to say what the disease is because it changes from time to time. It may start out as a rheumatoid arthritis and later change into a sort of Bright's Disease of the kidneys, or it may turn into a skin disease or an anemia. There is some inflammation of the joints in 90 per cent of the cases.

In some cases, most of the trouble may seem to be in the heart and the arteries. Pleurisy appears at times, in half of the cases, and there may be symptoms suggesting pneumonia.

Sometimes, there are symptoms obviously arising in the nervous system—symptoms such as seizures, or hallucinations, or mental disturbances. There may be acute disturbances in the stomach and bowel with perhaps bleeding.

From 15 to 20 per cent of the patients have a large spleen and large lymph nodes in the neck, the arm pits, and the groins. The laboratory expert can often make the diagnosis by demonstrating the so-called LE cells, which my friend, Dr. M. M. Hargraves at Mayo's found years ago in the blood of these patients. A little bit of inflamed tissue cut out and examined under the microscope (a biopsy) may confirm the diagnosis. The "rheumatoid factor" may be found in the blood of a third of the patients.

Drug Produces Symptoms

It is interesting that the drug, hydralazine, which is used in the treatment of high blood pressure, sometimes produces symptoms that suggest the coming of a SLE. Fortunately, the symptoms disappear when the use of the drug is stopped.

The treatment of SLE is aimed at controlling and suppressing the symptoms as they arise. Salicylates such as aspirin are used to relieve pain, particularly when the joints are involved. Fever can be reduced with the help of certain drugs. Corticosteroids will sometimes put a stop to a bad flare-up in the disease,

Grocery Clerks Reject Proposal

Portland—UPI—Some 2,000 Portland area grocery clerks, members of the Food and Drug Clerks Union, Local 1092, "overwhelmingly" voted to reject an employer offer and authorized their negotiating committee to call a strike if an acceptable offer is not forthcoming, the union said Wednesday.

The clerks rejected a two-year offer from Food Employers, Inc., and some independent grocers.

The present contract expired April 29. Negotiations have been carried on under the U.S. Mediation and Conciliation Service.

Journeymen clerks presently are paid \$2.46 an hour. They are asking for 15 cents an hour a year increase over a two-year period.

PERSIAN GULF OIL

Chicago—UPI—A discovery well on the offshore field of Standard Oil Co. (Indiana) in the Persian Gulf has produced oil at rates up to 35,000 barrels a day. National Iranian Oil Co. is partner with Indiana Standard in the venture.

but they have no effect on the basic cause of the trouble. Unfortunately, steroids must be used with great care because they can produce serious and dangerous "side reactions." Curiously, certain anti-malarial drugs such as atabrine and chloroquine will sometimes help the arthritis and the skin lesions. If infections give trouble, antibiotics will be used. Treatment is difficult especially when the kidneys fail to function well.

With his informative booklet, "Menopause and Hysterectomy," Dr. Alvarez has removed the fears of thousands of women. If you would like a copy, send 25 cents and a large, stamped, self-addressed envelope with your request to Dr. Walter C. Alvarez, Dept. MMT, The Register and Tribune Syndicate, Box 957, Des Moines 4, Iowa.

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