

Thalidomide Scare Tightens Law But Sorrow Lingers

United Press International
Just a year after Europe's great "thalidomide scare," tightened drug laws and the passage of time appear to have ended a tragic harvest of cruelly deformed babies.

But sorrow, suffering and bitterness linger.

In Europe, it is estimated about 6,000 infants were born between 1958 and the end of 1962 as phocomelias, or "seal babies." These children, many of them, came into the world with no arms, or flipper-like appendages where their arms were sup-

posed to be, or with other horrible deformities. Exact official figures are lacking, but the drug thalidomide was blamed for many of the deformed births, to mothers who had taken the German-discovered and developed drug during pregnancy.

The greatest damage was done in West Germany where, according to the federal health ministry, about 5,000 "thalidomide babies" were born up to the end of last year, of whom 3,184 are still living.

The drug first was introduced in West Germany—in 1957—and was used on a wide scale. Under a variety of names—"Contergan," "Distaval" and "softenon"—it spread to markets throughout most of Europe and to other parts of the world.

It never was marketed without prescription in the United States where approval was withheld by the Federal Drug and Health Administration. But it could be obtained by Americans from Europe. One result was the widely-publicized case of Mrs. Sherri Finkbine, 30-year-old Phoenix, Arizona, housewife who flew to Sweden last August to undergo a legal abortion there because she had taken Thalidomide during pregnancy and refused to risk having a malformed child.

Thalidomide was first pro-

duced by Chemie Grunenthal, one of Germany's most highly respected chemical firms, in 1953. After exhaustive tests it was approved by official clinics and placed on the market in 1957. Its attributes were remarkable. It was a highly effective sedative that could be taken with no known after-effects; it was an effective sleep-inducer.

Reduced Misery
And, it showed later, when taken by prospective mothers it took a lot of misery out of pregnancy, including morning sickness.

By the end of 1961 something like 100 million thalidomide pills had been sold. The drug also was sold in liquid form, and as a suppository.

But by 1961 medical men already were having serious second thoughts about this new "wonder drug." As early as the autumn of 1960, German doctors were disturbed by a sudden increase in deformed births in the country. By November, 1961, Dr. Widikund Lenz of Hamburg, a specialist in childbirth and child care, thought he knew the reason. On Nov. 16, 1961, he telephoned the Grunenthal firm at its head office in Stolberg and expressed his fears. He urged the company to withdraw "Contergan," the name under which it was sold in Germany, from the market.

On Nov. 19, Grunenthal withdrew it.

Already, according to Lenz, Germany could expect from 50 to 100 malformed babies to be born each month. His unhappy predic-

tion proved close to the mark.

In rapid succession other countries withdrew the vari-

ous thalidomide drugs from their markets.

Then the toll in malformed babies was counted. In Britain there were no over-all official figures but competent estimates ran as high as 800 "seal" babies born before the drug was withheld; 53 were officially confirmed. Sweden counted 153 deformed births up to the end of 1962, with 111 confirmed as born to "thalidomide mothers." Holland had 16, Norway 19, Austria 7, Switzerland "possibly" 10, Belgium 28.

Only France, Spain and Portugal reported no "thalidomide babies." In those three countries the drug never had been put freely on the market.

Suits Filed
Many parents sued for redress. In Germany about 60 law suits were lined up against the Grunenthal company. Two of the suits, charging negligence became "test cases" for the others. The two cases currently are in recess while expert opinion on Contergan and its effects is being collected. They are due to resume later this year and it is predicted the legal battle may go on for years.

In Belgium, a 25-year-old mother, Mrs. Suzanne Colpel, her husband, their doctor and other relatives were put on trial for having murdered Mrs. Colpel's "seal" baby. They were acquitted and Belgians cheered the jury's verdict.

So far as public records show, no "thalidomide babies" have been born in Europe in 1963. The last such births to receive public attention were at Reading, England, on Sept. 29, 1962, and in Sterling, Scotland, on Nov. 18, 1962.

Laws Tightened
All countries affected by the thalidomide cases either have tightened or are in the process of tightening laws governing across-the-counter sales of drugs. Others are seeking ways to improve testing of drugs before they are



CHRISTMAS WEDDING - Bobby Vee, 20, teen-age singing idol, poses with his fiance and childhood sweetheart, Karen Bergen, 20. The couple plan a Christmas holiday wedding in Bobby's native town of Fargo, N. D. (UPI)

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Drivotron Gives Reaction Check In Auto Crash

By RICHARD FONTANA
United Press International
Pittsburgh—UPI—The truck appeared from nowhere. Brakes squealed. There was a crash, a blinding flash, then darkness.

Then the lights were turned on.

The crash occurred on a movie screen. The "car" involved was a compartment approximately 7 by 3 feet with a steering wheel, brakes, gas pedal and turn signals. It's a driving simulator (called "drivotron.")

The device is used to test motorist reaction and driving habits in situations under which most traffic accidents occur.

It works like this: The subject being examined sits in the simulated car while a movie is projected on a screen directly in front of him. The proximity of the driver to the screen makes the scenes almost life-like. The driver is then confronted with a series of emergencies and his reactions are recorded electronically. If he avoids the accident, the projector stops. If the accident occurs, a burst of stars hits the screen.

Determine Cause
A critique follows the examination and the reasons for the accidents are simple to determine. Generally, the primary causes are speeding and carelessness.

The National Safety Council fits the driver simulators "are quite valuable in both the areas of driver education and in safety research."

Principal users of the device are owners of commercial fleets and the U.S. Air Force. Most report considerable decline in accident rates after their drivers had been exposed to the examinations several times.

The manufacturers of the mechanism (Rockwell Mfg. Co. and Aetna Casualty and Surety Co.) do not consider the tests a panacea. But they do feel the process induces an awareness of the accident potential inherent in driving which annually causes enormous loss of life and property. In 1962, according to the National Safety Council, traffic accidents caused 40,900 deaths, 1.5 million disabling injuries and the loss of \$7.3 billion.

These devastating figures in most cases resulted from poor driving habits and techniques. This is what the testing is intended to alter.

RATE DOWN
Salem—UPI—The statewide rate of insured unemployment was down for the week ending Aug. 22 compared to both a year ago and four weeks ago, David H. Cameron, employment commissioner, said Wednesday.

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