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Hepatitis Virus Studied

State School Kids in Experiment

By DELOS SMITH
United Press Science Editor

By feeding the viruses which cause infectious hepatitis to children and checking the consequences with minute thoroughness, scientists have added considerably to the existing scant knowledge of that troublesome, widespread disease.

It's infectious as all get-out in surroundings where people live together intimately, such as in families, in military barracks, and in institutions. But, unfortunately, its viruses can't be studied in laboratory animals because they seem to sicken only people.

So if you're going to find out enough about their behavior to prevent them from getting around and to make people immune to them, you have to use human bodies as your laboratories.

The viruses were, therefore, fed to 40 children between the ages of 5 and 10 at Willowbrook State School. The institution became interested and agreed to participate in the experiments because of its high number of hepatitis cases.

"We thought something had to be done," said Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of the school.

Naturally, it was done with every scientific assurance that no harm would come to the children. The children came down with the disease, of course, but their sicknesses were all mild and all made complete recoveries.

The consent of parents or guardian was obtained in every case, and the experiments were watched over by top state medical authorities. The scientific investigators were headed by Dr. Robert Ward, professor of pediatrics, New York University College of Medicine, and included Dr. Oscar Bodansky, professor of biochemistry at Cornell University Medical College.

Others were Dr. Milton Jacobs, assistant director of Willowbrook; Dr. Saul Krugman, associate professor of pediatrics at the New York University College of Medicine, and Dr. Joan Giles, an assistant in pediatrics at the college of medicine.

As a result of the experiments, held over the past five years, children at Willowbrook have more immunity to the disease than in any other institution in the nation, Dr. Berman said.

ENTERS DIGESTIVE TRACT

The experiments demonstrated that the infectious hepatitis virus depends upon the human digestive tract. Entering by mouth, it incubates in the alimentary canal. The incubation period seems to be five to eight weeks, and then jaundice, which is the primary symptom of this liver infection, appears. If the incubation period is longer than 60 days, a secondary infection probably is involved.

But during the incubation period viruses were multiplying and these were excreted two to three weeks before there were any externally recognizable signs that the body was infected. In their detailed report to the New England Journal of Medicine, the scientists pointed to the people who entertain the viruses in their alimentary canals without knowing it, since they're never sick. Thus, this finding on the multiplication of viruses during the incubation period has "considerable bearing" on what makes infectious hepatitis so infectious.

Gamma globulin when injected in fairly large amounts was found to protect uninfected subjects against infection for as long as nine months. Smaller injections were not nearly as effective.

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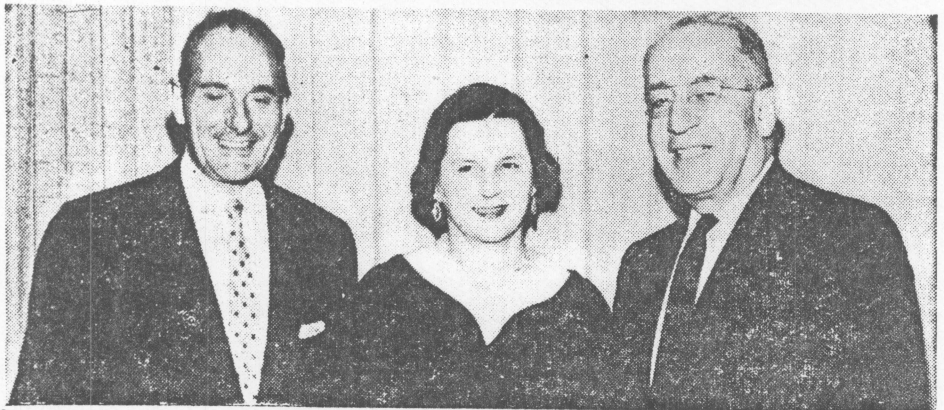
WILLOWBROOK GUILD PRESIDENT REELECTED



Florence Francis, an attendant at Willowbrook State School, was elected to her second term as president of the school's Protestant Altar Guild at the second annual dinner of the group. Shown left to right are the school's Protestant chaplain, Rev. J. Murdock Palmer, Mrs. Francis, and Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of Willowbrook, Staten Island.