

N.Y. Post SAT. 1/16/67

MA Hits Back at Thaler Over Retarded Children

By BARBARA YUNCKER

A charge that retarded children in state custody are being misused for research was renewed today by State Sen. Thaler (D-Queens) and drew an immediate rebuttal from the specialist who directs the research under attack.

Against the Senator's contention that scientific reports on research into hepatitis (liver inflammation) at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island confirm his allegations, Dr. Saul Krugman, pediatrics professor at NYU Medical School, cites the same reports to contend that the research has been "specifically beneficial" to the children involved. Krugman added that it offers the first real hope of a vaccine to control the "most important infectious disease problem still unsolved."

The Senator's charge and the doctor's answer, point by point:

Thaler: "1,153 children who did not have the disease when they entered Willowbrook were deliberately given hepatitis by injection." Krugman: "That figure happens to refer to children who got overt infections from natural contagion at Willowbrook. And 10 times as many more had unrecognized exposure. It was because of this constant hepatitis problem that we undertook the research," which has involved, he said, fewer than 500 children.

Thaler: "I simply don't buy

the statement that parents gave 'informed' consent," Krugman; "Parents of children on the waiting list for Willowbrook (a state school for the mentally retarded which always has a waiting list for admission) are told of our unit by the psychiatric social worker. If the mother is interested, one of the physicians involved talks to her. The parents are told all details, the potential risks and the potential benefits. Only if the parents agree and sign a consent form is a child accepted into the research project."

Thaler: "If it is so good for the kids they use, why don't they do it for all the children at Willowbrook"—and "every other state school for the retarded?" Krugman [paraphrased]: "Viruses and vaccines are tricky and difficult; you have to be sure before you move from ground which is explored; we are still in research and other strains of hepatitis virus may be involved elsewhere."

"If I had a mentally retarded child," Krugman said, "I would hope that my child would be

in a program like ours."

Children who enter Willowbrook through the research unit, he said, are protected initially—by their isolation—from the other infectious diseases which also plague such "inmate" populations.

Because of the natural effects of children living at close quarters, he said, the children given the pre-vaccine injections would have been exposed to hepatitis at less-controlled levels if they had come into Willowbrook in one of the non-research units.

They also benefit, he says, from the greater concentration of care which the research unit provides. Most gain weight during their two months in the unit and move on into the appropriate Willowbrook unit for long-range care "much better equipped physically" than as though they had come in directly, Krugman believes.

His research group—which has been a major contributor to a proved vaccine against measles and a virtually-proved vaccine against infant-deforming German measles—is hoping, he says, to do the same eradication job against hepatitis. It has already made a permanent mark in medical archives by showing for the first time that the liver ailment which is mild in children but very serious in adults takes two forms probably caused by two different viruses. Like polio, hepatitis may need a multi-virus vaccine.