

# 12,000 questions in two years

By William Erwin

The voice on the phone didn't sound unusual, but the question did.

"I'm a health educator in Pitt County. Sometimes school kids ask me whether smoking marijuana causes cancer. Does it?"

Karen McCrory, information specialist at Duke's Cancer Information Service, had the answer in less than a minute. Reading from a thick loose-leaf binder, she said:

"It's thought that smoking marijuana does not increase a person's risk of developing cancer because it is usually

smoked in very small amounts. The danger of smoking large amounts of marijuana may be greater, but no studies on this subject have been done."

#### Common and uncommon questions

Uncommon questions come in almost daily at the Cancer Information Service, which just turned two years old. Staff members and trained volunteers have fielded questions on the so-called "betabolic" cancer treatment, on unpronounceable new drugs and on possible links between personality types and cancer.

But most of the 12,000 people who've

called the service have had more basic questions, such as these:

"I have a discharge from one of my breasts. Does that mean I have cancer?"

"What are the symptoms of rectal cancer?"

"How can I get medical treatment if I don't have health insurance?"

"I want to quit smoking and I'd like some help. Can you send me something?"

#### Anyone can call

Anyone in North Carolina can reach the service without charge by dialing 1-800-672-0943. Persons in surrounding

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Hello! I just read about a miracle cancer treatment and I wanted to know...



## Duke University Medical Center

# Intercom

VOL. 25, NO. 21

MAY 26, 1978

DURHAM, N.C.

## Duke team calls for easier access to mental health care

Medicine in the United States could be improved significantly if the traditional barriers between mental and general health services were broken down.

That was the conclusion a team of researchers at Duke reached after completing a major study of the relationship between those services.

The project was commissioned by the Institute of Medicine, a branch of the National Academy of Sciences that advises the federal government on proposed medical care, research and education policy.

In the first section of their 342-page report, the authors point out that only about a fifth of the more than 30 million Americans believed to suffer some form of mental illness are treated by professionals specifically trained to handle psychological problems.

Sixty percent of the patients are seen by non-psychiatric physicians, while most of the rest either go untreated or seek help from non-professional sources.

The researchers, who reviewed more than 800 scientific publications in their study, said there is almost no information

available on how non-psychiatric physicians treat mental illness and very little data on the kinds of disorders they see.

Several studies, however, have surveyed non-psychiatric physicians about their attitudes toward treating patients with psychological problems.

Those questioned typically reported they lacked confidence in treating mental illness, that such disorders are harder to treat than physical complaints and that their results were not as good as with other patients.

"Interestingly, while there is no evidence concerning the emotional drain on the physician that these patients represent, many of us working in medical centers know that this is a significant concern of the non-psychiatric physician," the researchers said.

Despite these difficulties, the Duke team found that well under half of all patients diagnosed as having psychological problems are referred to mental health specialists. The age, sex and socioeconomic status of the patient all affect the likelihood of referral, as does the physician's attitude toward the psychiatric profession.

Other barriers to the best treatment include negative public attitudes toward mental illness, the financial burden of psychiatric care and ignorance about available treatment facilities.

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## Audiologist offers advice for parents

By Parker Herring

(From a report by Linda Wilson, reporter for speech and hearing.)

May was designated National Better Hearing and Speech Month, and Janice Mack, director of Duke's Acoustic Program, has been busy promoting the month's theme.

In an interview last week, she offered some advice for parents.

"Parents should ask themselves if they have any worries about their child's hearing," Mack said, "and if they do, they should take the child to an audiologist," a specialist in detecting hearing disorders.

She said some parents hesitate to seek help because they are either scared of what they might find out or they feel guilty about the child's disability.

Audiologists can test for hearing loss even in infants. "If a hearing loss is detected," she added, "parents can take comfort in the fact that there are trained professionals who can work with them."

Mack said there are milestones in

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LEARNING TO TALK—Duke audiologist Janice Mack (right) uses toys and food to encourage 3-year-old Aaron Summey of Chapel Hill to learn to talk. Aaron has had limited hearing since birth. Two hearing aids and a battery-powered amplifier boost his hearing to a level that enables him

to learn to talk. Aaron and his mother Linda Summey attend training sessions with Mack offered through the Acoustic Program of Duke's Center for Speech and Hearing Disorders. (Photo by Parker Herring)