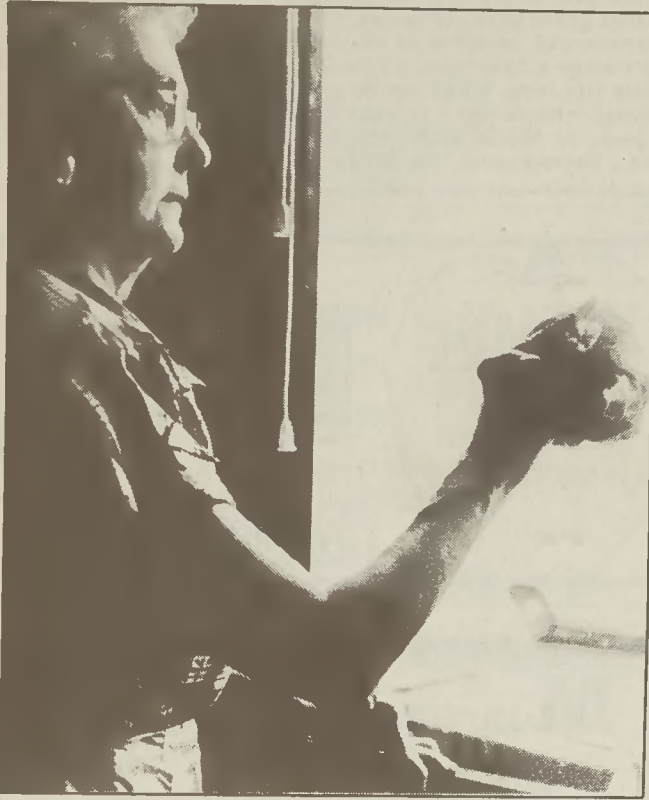


In The Joint!



scene from Riddle Of The Joints on PBS

By Sharon Broom
TV Writer

Is rheumatoid arthritis a 170-year-old epidemic that will eventually run its course and disappear as mysteriously as it came?

An unusual trail of evidence, leading from medieval skeletons to a small town in Connecticut, is shedding new light on the disease, a crippling inflammation of the joints which afflicts over two million people in the U.S. and has no known cause or cure.

NOVA, the award-winning science documentary series, explores new clues in "Riddle of the Joints," airing Tuesday, May 31, at 8 p.m. The program will be seen over the 10 channels of North Carolina Public Television. May is recognized as National Arthritis Month.

The first symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis are usually stiffness and painful swelling in the joints. The disease often gets progressively worse over the course of decades, sometimes spreading to almost every joint in the body.

An important clue to its cause is that the disease seems to have developed relatively recently. Dr. Paul Dieppe and others at the Bristol Royal Infirmary in England have studied thousands of skeletons from medieval times and found no sign of the characteristic erosion around the joint that signals rheumatoid arthritis.

The first clear case was described in 1818 by a French physician. Soon after, the disease apparently became common throughout Europe. Its sudden appearance and spread is a sign that it is probably caused by an infectious agent, such as a bacterium or virus.

But since rheumatoid arthritis does not respond to antibiotics, as an infection should, and no specific virus has been isolated, its cause remains a mystery. To add further confusion, there is no clear pattern of transmission; the disease is not contagious and seems to pick its victims almost at random.

But infected individuals still produce numerous antibodies, as if some foreign microbe were attacking them.

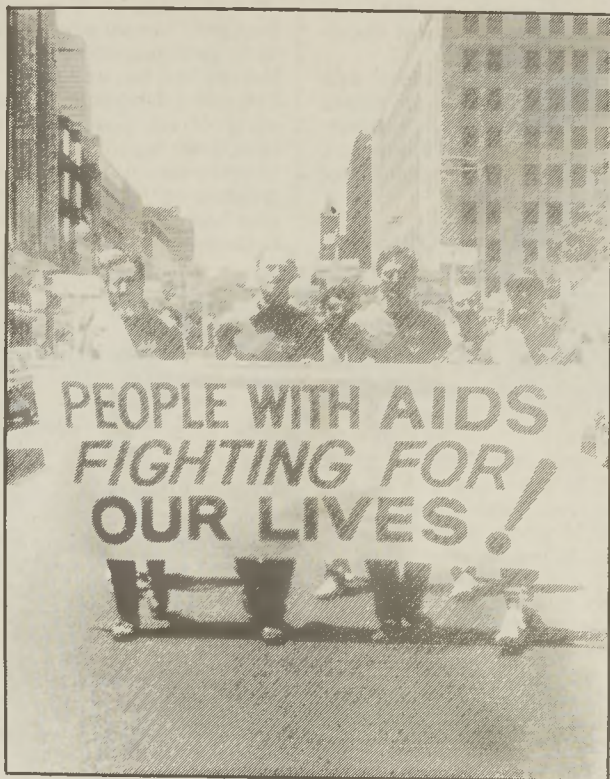
Researcher Gabriel Panyi of London's Westminster Hospital theorizes from this that a virus is responsible, "a very clever virus," he says -- one that is able to remain hidden and cause the immune system to attack the body's own tissues, specifically those in the joints.

In Lyme, Conn., a bacterium transmitted by local ticks was found to cause a form of arthritis in just this way, by stimulating the immune system to turn against the body. Though Lyme's disease is caused by bacteria and can be effectively treated, it provides a model for how rheumatoid arthritis may work.

Other researchers have found that a "misprint" in the body's genetic code may determine susceptibility to the disease. This would explain why the epidemic is so erratic. A person can carry the virus but won't be stricken unless he or she also has the genetic defect.

While great strides have been made in understanding rheumatoid arthritis, the prospects for a cure remain uncertain. And some scientists think that, in the end, the disease will simply disappear as mysteriously as it came. As Dieppe said, "It could go away, perhaps because we've cracked it, or perhaps just with time letting the epidemic pass by."

AIDS Costs Money



scene from Who Pays For AIDS? on PBS

By Dawn Battiste
TV Writer

Suppose your medical bill for the year was \$125,000. Suppose that you were so ill that you could not work and that you had no private health insurance. Where would you turn?

Patrick, a 30-year-old man living in Kansas City, Mo., is one of 56,000 Americans diagnosed with AIDS since 1981. His bills are being paid by Medicaid.

"Who Pays for AIDS?," a FRONTLINE documentary, examines the health care crisis created by the disease and the struggle between local governments and Washington over who will pay the skyrocketing cost. The program airs Tuesday, June 7, at 9 p.m., over the 10 channels of North Carolina Public Television.

It is estimated that by 1991 the bill for caring for people with AIDS will reach \$8 to \$10 billion a year. At least half of those costs will be absorbed by the taxpayers. In some parts of country, the financial burden of treating the disease is already debilitating. "We are at a saturation point," warns Phil Sowa, director of San Francisco General Hospital. "We cannot tolerate any increased admissions without compromising our ability to care for the other patients that we serve."

In New York, the director of a methadone clinic explains that his facility has now also become, by necessity, an AIDS clinic for infected drug users. Despite this change in care, Medicaid reimburses the clinic only \$12 to \$13 per patient visit. Without more financial help, Dr. Peter Selwyn predicts that the center will close within a year. He comments, "What we've done is to add a whole structure of primary care for drug users in the age of AIDS, but we're not being paid for it."

The dilemma is obvious -- patients, AIDS victims as well as others, are having their opportunities for treatment limited by lack of funds. However, Washington's administration continues to oppose federal emergency funding. Dr. William Roper, director of the Health Care Financing System, explains that he is against a special AIDS financing program because establishing one means that "we will not be able to put money into cancer treatment or children with handicapped conditions."

For Patrick, the question moves beyond theory. He says that the issue is "Should they let me die or should they not?" He reflects, "Why should they spend money on me when they can actually save money? It's a tough question...I wouldn't want to take service away from someone else, I wouldn't want to think I have."

Is health care supposed to be an exercise in democracy? And if so, when does democracy become the deprivation of a patient? Most importantly, who will choose who receives the best medical treatment?

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Making Tracks!

Track Record, the new record label based in Seattle, WA, has announced the signing of The Ohio Players and The Average White Band. The Ohio Players, who've had three platinum and six gold LPs, just completed recording their first Track release, *Back*, which will be their first new record in eight years. The single, "Sweat" will be released April 25th. The Average White Band, whose biggest mid-seventies hits were "Pick Up The Pieces" and "Cut The Cake," are about to go into the studio to record their first Track LP.



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