

### Progress in research

The Council for Tobacco Research-USA, has just announced that significant progress is being made in the search for the cause or causes of emphysema and for ways to detect persons who may have an inherited susceptibility to this crippling lung disease.

The council was organized in 1954 and through last December, had approved numerous research projects totaling more than \$35 million for 336 independent scientists in 227 medical schools, hospitals and research institutions.

The latest report shows 78 research papers published in scientific journals last year. So far some 1,340 papers have been published.

The researchers have found evidence indicating that emphysema

proteases somehow become decontrolled and literally "digest" the proteins in the lung's elastic structural material.

The council has been supporting research by independent scientists into the questions raised about tobacco use and health. The focus has been chiefly on cancer, heart disease, and chronic pulmonary ailments such as emphysema.

Fresh clues have been found by researchers, which have resulted in a strong wave of new interest and activity in this obscure and baffling field.

We can never underestimate the value of research in many kindred fields of medicine. One day there will likely be known cures for almost all of those which now baffle society.

### Learning the metric system

In an election year, it seems everything that happens in state government is affected by politics.

Even the metric system.

One of the brighter ideas developed by the State Department of Public Instruction was to have dual road signs around the state. Then, motorists could get used to the idea of having signs telling them the speed limit in kilometers per hour, and distances in kilometers as well as miles.

But Public Instruction is under the leadership of Democrat Craig Phillips, and the Department of Transportation has been under Republican rule for the past three years.

Such signs would cost too much, cause motorist confusion, create unnecessary work for highway crews, etc. A couple were posted in the vicinity of the Research Triangle Park, but not widely.

Then, educators needed a public

boost to call attention to the upcoming conversion to metrics.

But Republican Gov James E. Holshouser Jr. couldn't break away from his busy schedule to proclaim Metric Week.

Nonetheless, conversion to metrics is underway with the national law signed into effect last December, and with state textbooks and classrooms slated for full use of metrics by 1981.

The key to it, says Robert R. Jones, director of mathematics at the Department of Public Instruction, is to "think metrics."

Conversion should be avoided. Don't try to remember how many pounds make a kilogram... just learn to use metric scales and thermometers so the figures become comfortable, Jones says.

For youngsters, it might be easy. The hard part is for grownups who must unlearn the old in order to learn the new.

### 'Bottle bills' controversial

Since 1960, when the U. S. soft-drink and beer industries began putting most of their beverages into cans and "no-deposit, no return" bottles, we've added millions of tons of trash to our national garbage can. We are now using about 60 billion throwaways, accounting for nine million tons of garbage, a year. And no traveler need be told that a large percentage of these throwaways find their way each year to the national roadside, where they remain as eyesores and health hazards.

Yet things needn't be that way, reports a March Reader's Digest article. Two states — Vermont and Oregon — have reduced litter dramatically in recent years by introducing stringent laws banning throwaway bottles and cans. This kind of legislation — which has come to be known as "the bottle bill" — led to a deposit-and-refund system on beer and carbonated soft-drink containers, including cans.

The laws have been successful. One study indicated that Oregon's beverage trash was down 83 percent within two years after the bottle bill; another study showed that litter in Vermont declined 76 percent in one year; total litter was down 36 percent.

But despite the fact that hundreds of additional bottle bills have been introduced on state and local levels, opposition is fierce and only a handful of these bills have been enacted.

The impact of such legislation in terms of money and jobs is one of the major issues being debated by legislators. Claims are made on the part of the industry that such bills will cause job losses, while others claim that such bills will create jobs.

Conversion to refillable bottle systems would cost industry billions, would throw from 60,000 to 160,000 people out of work, and would cost consumers a fortune as beverage prices increase to cover the conversion costs to industry. These are the claims of the beverage industry, backed by can and glass makers, beer wholesalers and some large unions active in related industries.

Nonsense! say consumer groups, supported by such diverse organizations as the Environmental Protection Agency (which wants a federal bottle bill), the National League of Cities, the U. S. Conference of Mayors, the League of Women Voters and the United Auto Workers.

Initial conversion costs, they say, will be compensated for in future years by lower costs per filling as refillables replace throwaways. Authors Earl and Miriam Selby quote a 1971 study concluding "that changing from throwaways to refillables would save consumers about \$1.4 billion a year." And regarding the unemployment question, advocates say that while there would be some job dislocation (principally in the container field), jobs would be created in the areas of beverage manufacture and distribution.

Meanwhile, residents of Vermont and Oregon are enthusiastic about their bottle bills. Every attempt to repeal or cripple the law in Vermont has been defeated. In Oregon a study reports that "nine in ten people said they approved, and only one in 20 voiced any disapproval at all."

The General Assembly of both North and South Carolina have had such a bill under consideration, but both were rejected.

When public sentiment gets heated, such a measure, it will become law.



### Assembly sidesteps battle

An almost certain showdown between lawyers pleading "right to sue" and legislators speaking for physicians pleading "immunity" was avoided in North Carolina's new malpractice law.

The end result of the new law is that little is changed.

Up until the last minute, the proposal submitted to the General Assembly still contained two controversial elements:

— a mutual fund to be drawn on for awards in excess of \$100,000; to be held by the State

### Health Education Program

The Health Education Program is another service of Madison County Health Department. The goal of the health education program is to help people develop necessary attitudes, knowledge and practices so they can achieve an optimal state of health for themselves, their family and their community.

Public health education involves the communication of health information to individuals, groups and the general public through the use of patient, school and community health education programs, educational materials, audio-visual materials, news media and other resources. The health educator is available to all county schools, agencies, community groups and organizations for programs concerning health information, films, educational literature and other resource materials concerning health.

Anyone interested in a program or educational materials concerning health information or services provided by the Health Department should contact Madison County Health Department at 649-3531.

Treasurer and defended by the Attorney General;

— a method whereby a large jury award could be spread out in periodic payments to "protect" the winning plaintiff from his own folly.

WOULDN'TFLY  
Just before the legislative session opened, Dr. John R. Gamble Jr., D-Lincoln, conceded that the proposals "have things in them that won't fly... we're going back to the drawing boards."

What emerged from the further study was a package which most experts consider a "token gesture" to the medical people.

State Sen. Thomas H. Sudderth, D-Davidson County, was from the outset the most outspoken critic of the various steps proposed in the malpractice situation. He first called for a medical-legal review board and pushed unsuccessfully for that.

Throughout he argued loud and long that proposed changes would take away the rights of minors to sue; would remove elements necessary to win a case; would set up a psychological barrier to jurors faced with paying out of the Treasurer's Office funds defended by the Attorney General; and would create numerous barriers to the Constitutional right to seek court redress of a wrong.

As a member of the commission, he delivered himself of a minority report as the lone dissenter and urged that the assembly take no action in haste on such a ticklish subject.

STAY QUIET  
Sudderth remained quiet in Assembly debate, and only after it was all over did he comment: "I believe my goal was accomplished. I do not think the law will have any appreciable effect on the public's legal rights.

"My goal has been all along that we help the health care providers without hurting people, and this has been accomplished without needless sacrifice of a basic right of citizens," Sudderth said.

Sudderth thinks the mutual fund as finally established will work to reduce malpractice

insurance rates, while providing some competition for the insurance companies — both pluses in his estimation.

Overall, the new law does change the time limit in which suit can be filed to three years in the case of an obvious injury; but allows up to 10 years for suits involving foreign objects left in the body, and four years for "hidden" injuries. For minors, the statute of limitations runs until a year after they become adults.

While case history statistics are sketchy, insurance company figures tend to show that the new time limits exceed the usual times involved in actual suits in the past.

The partial-payment plan was scuttled; and the mutual fund to be made up of money paid in by health care providers will be run by an independent board. Thus, the physician will buy insurance for \$100,000 and participate in the fund for coverage above that.

On the question of standard-of-care, the new law says expert testimony supporting the plaintiff must come from someone "familiar with" the usual practice in a similar community; not necessarily an imported expert.

Two other elements complete the package: extension of the "good samaritan" protection of law to health care providers other than physicians who seek to help in an emergency; and a restriction on making public the amount sought in a suit.

The May budget session of the North Carolina General Assembly proved to be a particularly trying one for most legislators.

The private offices, back halls and coffee shops have been the scenes of more complaining than usual by members who felt frustrated by the time pressures, the hardball politics being played, and the system whereby most members were left out of the decisions until finally asked to vote approval so the session could adjourn and go home.

A few random samplings of legislative grousing will illustrate the problem.

"I know now why they called it a mini-session; that stands for minimum input from members," said a veteran member of the House of Representatives.

"They asked us to come down a couple of weeks early and butcher the hog. We did. Then when the session opened we discovered they had given away the hams and left livermush," complained a member of the House Base Budget Committee.

The reference is to the hard cutting done by that committee, only to have the money spent for new or expanded programs.

"I want to know who these leaders are who are making all the decisions," fussed a veteran senator, who considered himself a leader, upon reading a newspaper report that the leadership had reached agreement on the pay raise question.

Two major problems plagued this assembly, and a host of legislators are vowing never to allow such elements to combine again:

1. Legislators seeking reelection face an Aug. 17 primary, and several also are geared up for higher races; severe pressure was exerted to move rapidly through the session's business.

To do that, both House and Senate reversed the usual procedure in which ideas and proposals are percolated up from the bottom, through committees, onto the floor, and into law. The proposals were generated at the top and pushed downward for hasty approval.

Things were changed overnight; nothing would stick; members felt betrayed at times and blackmailed at others. And the rapidly worsening ill-relationship between House and Senate leaders only made the problem worse.

2. Lt. Gov. James B. Hunt Jr., is running for governor; House Speaker James C. Green is running for lieutenant governor; and two representatives — Carl Stewart and Billy Watkins — are in a bitter fight for election as speaker of the house in the 1977-78 session.

In numerous instances, those ambitions emerged in putting forth proposals or

opposing them — not on merit, but on the basis of who might benefit or be hurt; who might get credit — and votes.

"If I had not already filed for re-election, I'd just quit," one particularly able legislator complained angrily during the confused session. That person is on the important committees involved and is considered a member of the elite leadership group, but his first-hand look at the political jockeying and bitter feuding was upsetting.

A solution to the problems created by the May session must be carefully thought through by legislators, but already prominently mentioned are safeguards against allowing an assembly session and a campaign to run so closely together; changes in the method of choosing committee chairmen and other leadership people so that power would not be concentrated so completely; and guarantees that future sessions have sufficient time to allow membership participation in committee study and debate instead of proposals already written and agreed upon from the top being submitted for a rubber stamping.

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