

PELLAGRA

Something About Its Nature and Prevention

(By Marie Hearn of Health)

In this article an effort is made to present in as simple language as possible some of the more important items about pellagra which are of concern to the general public. The deaths reported from the disease in North Carolina have been increasing in number for the last six years, the lowest peak reached in the past twelve years occurring in 1923. In the year 1923 eight hundred and forty-seven deaths occurred. For the first half of that year three hundred and five deaths were reported. For the first half of the year nineteen-thirty, four hundred and sixty-eight deaths have already been reported. This is what might be called almost an alarming increase during that year. Deaths are being reported from all sections of North Carolina and from among all ages, races, and both sexes. The figures which we have

carefully compiled from the vital statistics records of the State Board of Health for a period of many years do not lend themselves to any casual interpretation. There are many things about the disease and its prevalence which have not yet been satisfactorily explained. In this publication we shall not attempt to consider this phase of the situation. There are many things which are definitely established, especially with relation to the prevention of the disease, and it is this feature which we shall emphasize at this time.

What Is Pellagra?

Pellagra is an endemic disease or condition which is now generally believed to be a deficiency disease. By a deficiency disease or condition is meant one that is dependant on the continued absence of essential elements, such as vitamins from the food. The question is frequently

asked, "Is it communicable?" The late Dr. Joseph Goldberger of the United States Public Health Service, one of the most reliable authorities in the world on the subject, has concluded that pellagra is not a communicable disease. The disease has been known since 1735, when it was first described by a Spanish physician. It was first recognized by the medical profession in North Carolina sometime about 1907. It is prevalent today in two or three of the European countries and in the southern part of the United States. North Carolina is a sufferer along with other Southern States at this time. This disease has not been reported heretofore in this State, and therefore there is no way to estimate accurately the number of people having the disease for every given death. However, Dr. Goldberger in one of his last published papers on the subject estimated that for every one reported there are fully twenty people with clearly recognizable symptoms, and probably many more who are either less definite symptoms. The disease, of course, is easy to recognize in the advanced stages, but in the beginning when the symptoms are mild, and perhaps appear and disappear during intervals of a few days, the condition is often very hard to diagnose. This is the time, however, when attention to further development is most important, and when most can be done for the patient. No one seems to be immune from attack, but judging from our records here at the State Board of Health office the disease does not seem to prevail to any great extent among children and young adolescents. For example, a careful tabulation of the figures for the year 1927 indicate that of seven hundred and twenty people who died during that year, only forty-seven, or less than one fifteenth, were under twenty years of age.

Symptoms of Pellagra

It is never sound policy for an board of health or any person health service to publish a list of symptoms of any disease or condition. The soundness of this policy is apparent to any person who will stop for a minute and think about the consequences which often ensue. The prevalent idea about the medical student who is certain that he has all the disease that he studies during the first year or so of his college course is well known. The symptoms, especially at different stages of various diseases, are often close in their resemblance to each other. As previously stated a diagnosis by a competent physician is sometimes hard to make. If we publish a list of cut and dried symptoms, the chances are that many people who may have, or think they have, some of the symptoms we might describe would undoubtedly become alarmed, and such a state of mind is always undesirable. As the condition is so prevalent at present, and as it is so important for people to understand something of the approach, it may be best for us to enumerate just a few general conditions under which Dr. Goldberger was pleased to term "Susceptious Symptoms."

There is a characteristic skin eruption, which often occurs on the hands and forearms, upon which the diagnosis of the disease frequently rests. This, of course, is to be taken into consideration with many other things concerning the history of the patient with special reference to the patient's eating habits. One prominent specialist has recently advanced the theory that light has something to do with the occurrence of pellagra. Thus some authorities have stated that one of the reasons why pellagra is more prevalent in the spring and summer is on account of exposure to sunlight. The late Dr. Edward J. Wood, a competent authority on the subject, said that the sun does not cause eruption of pellagra, for if it did, a patient in bed could not develop skin lesions of the covered portions, but it does play a part comparable to its action on the sensitive photorographer's plate. Dr. Wood said that he had frequently had trouble in convincing patients that their trouble was not simply sunburn. Dr. Wood also stated that "in many instances the skin eruption is the first, and indeed, in even more cases the only sign of sickness." In Dr. Wood's opinion, when the skin eruption, especially on the hands and forearms, recurs in patients who had previously had such symptoms, and which disappears with proper treatment, such eruption serves as a warning of a relapse, and the patient could prevent any further development of the disease through prompt action, when the skin eruption occurred.

Dr. Wood considered the symmetrical character of the eruption as one of the best single diagnostic points. That is, the eruption occurs on the two halves of the body in exactly the same position, shape and size. If it appears on one-half on one side of the body, it is sure to be followed, in most cases within a very few days, in exactly the same position on the other half of the body. Dr. Wood said that there were very few exceptions to this rule. Therefore a suspicious eruption occurring on the backs of the hands, forearms, or back of the foot, or the sides of the front of

(Continued on Page Eight)

J. P. Ipock

--"The Coal Man"

Says:

Of course we're glad to add our stamp of approval upon the new hospital and to say that it has been built for a most worthy cause—the relief of the afflicted from wherever they may come. Hearty congratulations to all who have helped from beginning to end.

And don't forget that there is yet some more "suffering" weather ahead of us in all probability, so phone us that order and recuperate the coal bin. A Coal for every need, priced right and delivered promptly.

Give your 'phone a ring!

J. P. Ipock

Telephone No. 144

ELKIN, N. C.

We Have It!

A Modern Hospital

WHICH OPENS ITS DOORS FOR INSPECTION ON

Sunday, April 19

WHEN THE PUBLIC WILL BE INVITED TO VISIT THE NEW

Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital

as it stands today—completed and ready to fulfill its mission of service.

Seeing is believing, and

In the completion of the

New hospital we have

Cause for thanks, so

Let's pledge our support

And stand behind this

Institution. We join in

Rejoicing at the opening.

Whether coming from or going to the new hospital, or on any other trip, you will always find that

Sinclair Products

are dependable. Service stations conveniently located throughout this territory, so drive by and let us fill your tank with Sinclair Gasoline and your motor with Opaline Motor Oil.

Your motor deserves the best—and Sinclair offers it!

H. P. Graham, Agent

Sinclair Refining Company
ELKIN, N. C.

Yes, Congratulations

Upon the Completion of the New

Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital

Much has been said about the new hospital building now completed, and highest praise bestowed upon those responsible for it, but only a visit of inspection will convince you fully of the meritorious work that has been accomplished—both by those who have made contributions and by the workmen who have built and finished such a magnificent structure. Our hearty congratulations!

This building means new-comers to our city, and we join in extending the right hand of welcome to them, and cordially invite their visit to our store, where a big stock of department store merchandise is always to be found, in newest styles and at prices that attract the thrifty.

We'll be glad to serve you.

Feldman's Department Store

Ray Feldman, Manager

Elkin, N. C.