

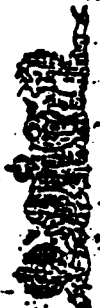
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MAGAZINE: Life on a con



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Scientists
track down
killer
just disease

By Dr Alfred Noyes,
Medical Correspondent

DISCOVERING "new" micro-organisms is a task of some importance, especially when they are the cause of a disease. The discovery of the killer of the killer, the disease, is a task of some importance, especially when they are the cause of a disease. The discovery of the killer of the killer, the disease, is a task of some importance, especially when they are the cause of a disease.



The authoritative touch: Sir Wilson in top form at the Salisbury Press conference

Wilson tells Rhodesians no excuse for UDI now

THE PRIME MINISTER returned to London today with a new proposal for resolving the Rhodesian independence crisis—a Royal Commission to decide the best way of consulting the Rhodesian people on a constitutional settlement and then to present them with proposals prepared by the British and Rhodesian Governments.

Wilson for talks with the Rhodesian leaders, are leaving for London later today. A British spokesman in Salisbury said they had made sufficient progress to enable them to report to the Cabinet. The fact that Mr Smith has once again held his hand is taken in Salisbury as a sign that his Cabinet is by no means united. Mr Smith told a party meeting last night that if the Royal Commission failed, "this would be the end of the road" and his Government would have to take "the only step" but he added that he was more confident about the prospects of a negotiated settlement.



Plowden inquiry control State in Concor

By Ted Coeller, At

STATE participation in the British Aircraft Corporation, the makers of the Concorde, is under scrutiny in the House of Commons. The House is expected to vote on a motion to be introduced by the Labour Party, which is demanding that the Government should have a say in the running of the company. The motion is expected to be passed, which would mean that the Government would have a say in the running of the company.

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By Col M

Scientists track down a killer dust disease

By Dr Alfred Byrne,
Medical Correspondent

A DISQUIETING "new" occupational disease capable of killing not only the exposed workman but also perhaps his womenfolk and even people living near his place of work is the subject of intensive behind-the-scenes activity by British scientists, experts on industrial health and representatives of at least two Government Ministries.

The condition is a rapidly fatal tumour named mesothelioma that spreads over the pleural covering of the lung. So rare a disorder was it, until recent years that many pathologists disputed its existence, but now the growth is being met in increasing numbers at autopsy, especially in patients at one time exposed to asbestos.

A remarkable report on an epidemiological investigation into this complaint, by Dr. Muriel Newhouse and Mrs. Hild a Thompson, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, has brought this whole matter to the surface. From ward case notes, interviews with family doctors and surviving relatives, and the records of an asbestos processing plant near by, they obtained the occupational and residential histories of 78 patients who died from mesothelioma at the London Hospital.

35-year interval

It was found that 40 (52.6 per cent.) of the cases had a history of occupational exposure to asbestos, or of having lived in the same house as an asbestos worker, compared with nine (11.5 per cent.) out of 78 patients from the same hospital with other diseases. The interval between first exposure and development of the fatal tumour ranged between 16 and 55 years.

Of nine patients whose relatives worked with asbestos, seven were women. The most usual history was that of the wife who used to wash her husband's dungarees or work clothes. In one instance a relative said that the husband, a dockworker, came home "wilted with asbestos" every evening for three or four years, during which the wife brushed him down.

The two men in this group had been boys of eight and nine when their sisters were working

Homes near factory

Among the fatal cases with no occupational or domestic exposure to asbestos 11 (30.6 per cent.) had lived within half a mile of the factory, as against five (7.0 per cent.) of the other patients, says the "British Journal of Industrial Medicine."

There were three affected women who had lived within half a mile of the factory when it was in production on its original site; they were then between five and seven years old.

The previously unrecognised risk of this particular tumour from asbestos was first driven home in 1960 when Dr. J. C. Wagner and co-workers reported 33 cases among people in South Africa who had been exposed to asbestos dust in the industry, or in the vicinity of the Cape asbestos mines. Their latest total is 130 cases.

Large increase

Dr Dermot Hourihane, now at Trinity College, Dublin, said yesterday that he had confirmed the diagnosis of this tumour in 141 cases at the London Hospital when he was pathologist there. "A few years ago there might have been perhaps four or five of these cases observed in a year in the whole of Britain," he added. "Recently we were seeing that number in one hospital and were invariably fatal."

Professor W. T. E. McCaughey, his present chief at Trinity, said that he and his colleagues had found 48 cases of this tumour among men in Belfast who had been exposed to asbestos when ship-building during the first world war. "And they still keep coming up all the time." Other series of cases have been reported from Newcastle upon Tyne, Leeds and Liverpool.

The Chief Inspector of Factories has set up a committee of experts to review urgently all the evidence on the medical problems of asbestos exposure.

The Ministry of Pensions is about to make mesothelioma of



Dr Newhouse

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Dust experts in talks on asbestos safety

Continued from page 1

the pleura a "prescribed" disease eligible for industrial benefit.

This is payable, however, only where the victim contracts a disease in the course of his employment. No compensation is due to the dependents of a woman who gets the tumour from contact with the dust brought home by her husband.

An enormous amount of experimental work on the biological effects of asbestos has been going on quietly at the Medical Research Council's pneumoconiosis unit at Cardiff, where Dr Wagner now works. They have shown there that exposing specially-bred rats to various kinds of asbestos can induce in the animals lungs conditions resembling the asbestosis of human beings, mesothelioma, and even perhaps lung cancer.

Some of the current studies are designed to find out which variety of asbestos is the most noxious and the minimum dose required to produce malignant changes. This could throw important light on the clinical disease for it seems that a very brief exposure to the dust can prove lethal in man.

The M.R.C.'s work is only one aspect of a vast international effort, for "outbreaks" of the tumour are being reported from other countries, notably the United States.

The International Union Against Cancer has enlisted a distinguished working party of doctors and scientists to study the association between exposure to asbestos and cancer. The world-wide programme of research they have recommended is detailed, elaborate and far-reaching. It goes a long way beyond considerations of mesothelioma, the incidence of which is a mere fleabite compared with that of lung cancer.

One particularly significant study already in progress is concerned with the presence of what are called asbestos bodies in the lungs. These are fibres of asbestos which have become coated with an iron-protein complex. Professor J. G. Thompson of Cape Town, first drew attention to the fact that they are abundant in cases of tumour but also present in otherwise healthy lungs. Since then Drs Hourihane and McCaughey and other researchers, both in this country and the U.S., have shown that between 20 and 30 per cent. of urban dwellers have asbestos bodies in their lungs without any history of exposure to asbestos.

Asbestos is therefore very much in the air. Whether these particles could possibly cause other unwelcome changes in the lungs is one of the vital questions that remains to be answered by research.