

Scandal Rocks Medical World in '74

By David Hendin

One of the biggest stories in the field of medicine in 1974 was a scandal. In April Dr. William T. Summerlin, a physician-scientist at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, was permanently relieved of his position and given a year's pay with the proviso that he received psychiatric counseling.

It was charged that Summerlin falsified potentially important research findings. Controversy swirled in the scientific community for months in what was widely referred to as "a medical Watergate."

A year or more before, Summerlin had reported that he could transplant tissue between different animals without using dangerous drugs to suppress the body's natural reaction—rejection and death of the tissue. If true, that observation held spectacular implications for transplantation of tissues and organs as well as cancer research.

But Summerlin was charged with falsifying his research data and painting black patches on white mice to make them look as if they had accepted skin grafts from black mice.

Summerlin admitted to darkening the skin of the mice, but denied any other falsification of data. He attributed the episode to "extreme pressure placed on me by the institute director."

That director is Dr. Robert A. Good, who had been heavily touting Summerlin's work ever since it was first announced, and had used its spectacular nature to improve fund raising for his institution.

Dr. Good concluded that it was an unfortunate episode, and noted that "In

science, it is completely senseless (to falsify). The nature of research is to test and retest until something stands up. A scientist cannot get away with falsifying results."

In the cancer research field, the American Cancer Society Environmental Cancer Research Project, headed by Drs. E. Cuyler Hammond and Irving Selikoff began in 1974 to answer questions about how environmental changes affect people. They are looking for data to confirm the World Health Organization estimate that some 85 per cent of all cancer is derived from environmental sources.

In January it was revealed that seven workers (of fewer than 300) working at the B.F. Goodrich plastics plant in Louisville, Ky. died of a rare tumor, angiosarcoma of the liver. Within weeks after the disclosure, other cases were discovered in New York, Texas, West Virginia and elsewhere.

The medical detectives have traced this alarmingly high incidence of the rare liver cancer to the fact that affected workers have been heavily exposed to the chemicals polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and vinyl chloride. They are widely used in the production of plastics, some of which are actually called vinyls.

The federal government has put a limit on the amount of vinyl chloride factory workers can be exposed to, but there was controversy among industry, consumer and government scientists as to just how much—if any—vinyl chloride might cause cancer.

It will be a long time before this is known, for environmental carcinogens carry with them something known as

the 20-year rule, which means that it usually takes a human being 20 to 30 years to develop cancer after being exposed to an environmental carcinogen. All of the plastics workers who came down with the rare liver cancer had been exposed to the chemical for at least 20 years.

Acupuncture continued to make news in 1974. In mid-year hundreds of newspapers ran stories exposing how hundreds of doctors are taking three-day quickie courses in acupuncture and then going out and trying it on patients. Such courses are little more than diploma mills.

Acupuncture clinics across the country continued to do a booming business, and more were in operation than ever before. But Dr. John Bonica, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Acupuncture of the National Institutes of Health and the American Society of Anesthesiologists, made important conclusions after intensive study of acupuncture here and in China. "The misuse of therapeutic acupuncture is an important health problem and the widespread clinical use of acupuncture is unwarranted at the present time," Dr. Bonica said.

Articles in medical journals detailed various complications of acupuncture

therapy ranging from damaged nerves and arteries to puncture of the lung and at least one death caused by a blood leak in the heart after needling in the area.

Dr. Samuel Rosen, New York ear specialist, did a six-month research study to determine whether acupuncture could relieve nerve deafness, as many proponents had claimed. Results were negative. "We see no basis for recommending acupuncture as a treatment modality for children with profound neuro-sensory deafness. I do not do this myself, nor do I recommend it to my colleagues," said Dr. Rosen.

Some other medical developments of the year: — The controversial Professional Standards Review Organizations (PSROs) got underway in 1974. The first contract for peer review of physicians went to the Utah PSRO, which served as a model for the peer review of medical work performed on patients whose bills are paid in any way by the federal government.

— In July Prof. Douglas Bevis, a British gynecologist at Leeds University, announced that three babies that had been conceived in test tubes had been born normally. But controversy over the development upset Bevis, who later announced that he was giving up his research in this area altogether.

— The federal government reported in 1974 that more evidence has been compiled to show that cigarette smoking is the major cause of lung cancer, which killed 72,000 Americans in 1973. The U.S. Department of HEW also said that cigarette smoking is the primary cause of chronic bronchitis and emphysema and is a contributing factor leading to heart disease.

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San Antonio — Selected to attend the metal working course after completing basic training at Lackland AFB, Tex., is Airman Calvin J. Lashomb of Massena, N.Y.

Airman Lashomb, son of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne A. Lashomb of Star Route, Massena, will go to Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Md. During his six weeks at Lackland, he studied the Air Force mission, organization and customs and received special instruction in human relations.

The airman is a 1973 graduate of Norwood-Norfolk High School in Norwood, N.Y.

10:15 Mass

Sacred Heart Church now offers a nursery during the 10:15 Mass each Sunday. The nursery, open to any child from infancy to six years of age, is located in Room 101 in Sacred Heart School. Doors nearest to playground, are used as entrances.

One adult and four youth volunteers are present to care for the children. It is set up on a trial basis to determine if there is a need for this service. Anyone with questions, should call Mrs. Ray Sisak at 769-9184.

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