

ASSAILS OVEREATING AS CAUSE OF CANCER

Dr. Ewing Pleads at Lake Mohonk for Wider Program of Prevention.

HITS HEREDITARY ALARMS

And Opposes the Theory That the Malady Is Due to a Universal Parasite.

ITALIAN EXPERT IS HEARD

Dr. Bastianelli Says Campaign Should Be Divided Between Research and Control.

Special to The New York Times.

LAKE MOHONK, N. Y., Sept. 22.—Overemphasis on hereditary tendency toward cancer and ill-grounded announcements of the discoveries of alleged cancer-causing organisms have retarded the course of cancer prevention and cancer control, according to Dr. James Ewing of New York, who addressed the conference of cancer specialists meeting here at the call of the American Society for the Control of Cancer.

Many cancers are the result of known irritations and are preventable, said Dr. Ewing.

"Cancers of the lip, mouth, tongue and tonsil," he added, "are due mainly to broken or sharp-edged and uneven teeth or to tobacco. Gastric cancer is generally traced to abuse of the stomach. Early and abrupt weaning is a frequent cause of mammary cancer, although these and other cancers are the result of known causes and can be prevented

"It appears that the human race has a general susceptibility to the disease, which, however, rarely expresses itself unless extraneous exciting factors are brought into action, while the hereditary tendency may be present to an extreme degree without result, unless some of these factors are at work. Nevertheless, I do not believe that heredity can be dismissed from consideration in the origin of cancer.

"It is probably sound advice to offer the public, that when there is a strong tendency to cancer in the family the members of the family may well take unusual precautions against the disease. Nothing in the genetic study of cancer seems to justify the general interdiction of intermarriages among such families. It is important to remember that individuals inherit the family habits and environments of their forebears, and that these factors may explain some of the observations suggesting the influence of heredity.

Opposes Parasitic Theory.

"Another far more serious is the widespread assumption of the parasitic theory of the origin of cancer. If cancer is due to the action of an unknown, microscopic, perhaps ultramicroscopic universal parasite, then effectual prevention must wait upon its discovery.

"At the present day I have no hesitation in committing myself without reservation against this theory. With most general pathologists, I regard it as incompatible with the known facts about cancer. The assumption of a universal cancer parasite can only be held by those who assume in addition that cancer is a single disease, comparable to tuberculosis. This assumption appears to be untenable. Cancer is not a single pathological entity, but a great group of diseases of various origin and course."

After a discussion of the various types of cancer Dr. Ewing continued;

"If there were less anticipation of the imminent discovery of the universal cancer parasite, fewer announcements of its demonstration and more recognition of the specific exciting factors of cancer the cause of cancer control would be benefited.

"Finally the chief difficulty in arousing interest in the prevention of cancer is found in the necessary absence of immediate tangible results. Since the major forms of cancer are largely the result of human habits and bad habits, a certain intelligent reformation of the habits of the race must be accomplished before cancer prevention can show very tangible results. There is all the more need of approaching the subject with a sane systematic program."

Among specific causes of cancer, Dr. Ewing mentioned moles of certain types, elaborate dental plates with va-

rious metallic alloys and the use and especially the abuse of tobacco. He said that no effective antiseptic for the mouth had been discovered, and recommended gargling with plain soap and water.

Points to Perils of Overeating.

Discussing gastric cancer, Dr. Ewing continued:

"Man is the only animal who lives a long natural life with unrestricted access to unlimited quantities of food, and he is the only animal who suffers from gastric cancer. Habitual overeating is a nearly universal human practice.

"We are in a safe position to point out to the public that the commonest and one of the most fatal forms of cancer is due to habitual abuse of the stomach.

"The results of the campaign for the early diagnosis of cancer shows that the public will listen and heed, if plainly addressed. They are bringing their early or supposed cancers to the doctor, although deterred by the fear of an evil pronouncement. It is sound psychology to suppose that they will grasp more eagerly at knowledge that will prevent the onset of the dread disease.

"Yet I fear too much should not be expected of any effort, however extended, to acquaint the public with these facts and to get them to act upon them. It requires more than average intelligence to accept and act on advice which entails somewhat minute attention to one's organs. It also requires some time and means. Thus, when the means of prevention of cancer become widely known, cancer may become the eliminator of the unwary, the unintelligent and the unfit.

"However much or little cancer prevention may accomplish, it appears more and more evident that early diagnosis alone is not capable of accomplishing the desired reduction in the death rate. Every experienced observer knows that the patient coming with an early diagnosis all too often fails completely of a cure. The list of cancers curable from their first recognizable beginnings is a long one. The experience of patients accomplishing a cure of early cancer is generally a severe experience, while the fate of the failures is passed over in silence. The public knows these facts, and therefore any plan of squarely meeting the problem of cancer control must eventually lean heavily on prevention."

X-Ray Treatment Not Yet Solved.

Dr. Robert Bierich, director of the Institute of Cancer Research at Hamburg, said in part:

"The centre of the stage in all questions concerning the treatment of cancer is occupied by the still unsolved problem of the action of the X-rays on normal and malignant cells. Until this problem has been cleared up from the theoretical point of view, I believe that the practical work of treating cancers by X-rays cannot be improved. Even if we may concede that there are inoperable cases of cancer which have undoubtedly remained cured for a long period of years, we are, on the other hand, acquainted with cases which react to X-raying less readily or in some portions of the tumor not at all."

Dr. Bierich added that "the methods of X-ray treatment are up to the present day entirely empirical."

Dr. Raffaele Bastianelli, a Vice President of the Italian League for the Control of Cancer, said in part:

"Whatever may be the influence exerted upon the control of cancer by a well-conducted campaign of education and the measures connected with it, especially early diagnosis and early treatment, we cannot hope to engage in the fight with wholly effective weapons until the cause of cancer is known to us.

"We must unfortunately recognize that our present treatment of this disease has perhaps advanced nearly as far as possible and that even if a larger number of cases are submitted for early treatment, there will always be some which will not derive much benefit from it. So that our chief aim in trying to control cancer must be in the study of its cause, and our campaign must be divided equally between research and control.

"The Italian league is very young and cannot boast of any special results, but if we look around to the older leagues and especially to the more than century-old Middlesex Hospital of England, we must conclude that money, organization, persistent labor and researches wonderfully conducted have not yet brought us very far forward."