EMPIRE RHEUMATISM COUNCIL

TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT*

The 24th Annual Report was presented by the Chairman, Dr. W. S. C. Copeman, at the Annual Meeting held at the Hall of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries on May 4, 1961.

Dr. Copeman began by stating that the year 1960 had been one of the most important in the history of the Council. In research the number of projects had risen from twenty in 1959 to thirty-two in 1960, and medical expenditure had reached a record sum of £56,800. The Council’s Electron Microscopy Centre had been opened at St. Thomas’s Hospital Medical School, a further Unit on the action of drugs had been established at King’s College Hospital Medical School, and the first results of the work of the Field Survey Unit had been published.

In the sphere of education the bulletins issued periodically to all medical practitioners had received overwhelming approval and the Council’s exhibit at the B.M.A. Scientific Exhibition had been judged to have the highest teaching value of all those exhibited. The financial support the Council had gained had also reached a new peak, led by three magnificent gifts from Mr. R. F. Macfarlane, and Sir Edward and Lady Lewis. The Council was no less grateful to all the thousands who had responded to the appeal made by Dr. Roger Bannister on television, which resulted in the amount of £11,400 being received.

Research

Field Survey Unit.—A very significant statement had recently appeared in the Annual Public Survey of the United States of America—“Rheumatism cripples in the largest number of cases and kills in the smallest. This very ability to cripple without killing now seems to put it in the lead of all other chronic diseases as of eminent social, economic and medical importance.” This had been borne out by the first comprehensive population survey of its kind, which had shown the widespread prevalence of rheumatoid arthritis and other forms of rheumatism in Great Britain.

The survey, carried out by the Council’s Field Survey Unit under the direction of Dr. J. S. Lawrence, had brought to light the fact that there were nearly 1½ million people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis in this country at any one time. Members of the medical profession had always suspected that more people suffered from this disease than was generally supposed, but even they had been startled by this figure. The survey had also shown that the changes caused by osteo-arthritis began to appear in about one person in ten by the age of 24 and rose steadily with age, until at 65 over 60 per cent. of all men and women had osteo-arthritis sufficiently acute to cause pain and disability, a total of 3½ million people.

In producing these authoritative figures, the Field Unit had made an important contribution to knowledge. The survey had also revealed a hereditary tendency to certain forms of rheumatoid arthritis; that one person in twenty suffered from an acute form of rheumatism or polyarthritis which had not been previously recognized; and that disk degeneration affected nearly 20 million people over the age of 15. Dr. Lawrence and his team were to be congratulated on this significant contribution to knowledge.

Electron Microscopy Unit.—The Council’s Electron Microscopy Centre at St. Thomas’s Hospital Medical School had been officially opened by the Chairman of the National Research Fund Appeal, Col. the Lord Astor of Hever, on October 6. Work on osteo-arthritis had now begun under the direction of Professor D. V. Davies and the instrument was available for other research workers in the field of rheumatic diseases.

Industrial Rheumatism Unit.—This was based on Edinburgh University and began work during 1960.

Unit on Drug Action.—This has been endowed by the Council for a period of 5 years at King’s College Hospital Medical School at a cost of £20,000, to study the action of drugs used in the treatment of rheumatic diseases.

Other Research.—During 1960 other research projects had been financed after careful scrutiny by the Scientific Committees, led by Professor G. A. Smart. These projects, covering a wide field—rheumatoid arthritis, osteo-arthritis, the action of drugs, auto-immune factors, and many others—were spread throughout Great Britain—Edinburgh, Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham,
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Cambridge, Bath, and London, being only a few of the places in Great Britain where research was going on.

One of the most important inquiries was being carried on at the University of Birmingham under Professor J. R. Squire. A sum of £200,000 had been raised among local industrialists to cover the cost of a special wing of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, the building of which should be completed during 1962.

COMMONWEALTH

Sister organizations in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were also continuing to increase their activities. The Australian Rheumatism Council's appeal for funds had received a magnificent start with the generous gift of £A100,000 from Mr. Spurway of Sydney.*

In conclusion the Chairman paid tribute to the many people who had made the work possible,

* The full report (p. 30) includes full details of the activities of these societies and of the research being carried out in the University of Otago, New Zealand, which is financed by the Council.

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A joint meeting of the Ligue Francaise contre le Rhumatisme and the Heberden Society was held in Paris on May 27 and 28, 1961. At the Hôpital de la Pitié, Professor Layani, Director of the rheumatism service, welcomed the Heberden Society on behalf of the Ligue. After an inspection of the newly built unit, where the excellent facilities for out-patients and physiotherapy were greatly admired, papers were read from both Societies.

The Effect of Hemiplegia on the Development of Arthritis, by Dr. Malcolm Thompson (Newcastle) and Prof. E. G. L. Bywaters (London): A review of the literature suggested that hemiplegia offered a protective mechanism against the development of arthritis, and further cases which supported this hypothesis were described. The first was a case of hemiplegia in which Heberden's nodes had developed only on the unaffected hand. Attention was drawn to the fact that there was only one report of a patient who had survived a hemiplegic episode in childhood and subsequently developed rheumatoid arthritis; case histories of three further patients were then presented. In all three there was similar protection against the development of rheumatoid lesions in the joints and subcutaneous nodule formation in the paretic limbs and there were striking differences in the radiological signs on the two sides. A b rocal arteriogram in one of these patients showed arthritis to be present both on the side affected with rheumatoid arthritis and in the protected hemiplegic limb. Prof. Bywaters suggested that arthritis probably resulted from the circulating rheumatoid factor rather than the local presence of arthritis.

Resting the Cervical Spine, by Dr. J. Forestier (Aix-les-Bains): The difficulties in trying to rest the cervical spine at night were described by Dr. Forestier. He then demonstrated the use of a cylindrical pillow with a restricted part in the centre which offered an adequate solution of this problem.

Studies with Radioactive Gold,* by Dr. J. S. Lawrence (Manchester).

Temporary Loose Hip, by Dr. G. Cordier, Dr. H. Garnier, and Dr. M. Darcy (Paris): The results were described of an operation for osteo-arthritis of the hip, the principle of which was section of the periarticular muscles in an attempt to overcome the painful muscular hypertonia in the region of the affected joint. More than one hundred cases had been operated on and 54 had been followed up for at least 6 months. Of these, 23 had had excellent results as regards pain and function, and 21 were good. Seven of these patients were demonstrated and their performance in walking with only a slight limp, bending, and even running was impressive. The actual technique of operation was shown in a film and the after-care, comprising traction for 15 days, followed by non-weight bearing physiotherapy for 5 months, was described.

Discussion.—The question was asked whether these results could have been obtained merely by taking the patient off weight-bearing for 3 months and employing a simple physiotherapeutic regime. This suggestion was

* To be published in full in the December, 1961, issue of the Annals.