Helping the Housewife Prevent Accidents In the Home

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DURING 1956 about 28,000 people died from the effects of home accidents, and accidents of all types were the primary cause of death in all age groups from 1 to 35 years.

In comparison with the community reaction evoked by heart disease, cancer, poliomyelitis, and mental illness, the community reaction to accidents has been conspicuously weak. With the exception of the National Safety Council, some State and local safety councils, and a small number of pioneering State and local public health officials, few agencies have given accident prevention the emphasis it warrants. Perhaps a feeling of helplessness has fostered this lack of emphasis, but with the growing acceptance of the fact that at least 80 percent of accidents are caused by what people do or by what they fail to do, public health workers are in a better position to exert leadership in accident prevention.

Since they stem from the actions of people, accidents can be made the subject of study, analysis, and prevention in the same way that human factors involved in the susceptibility of humans to disease have been studied.

The magnitude of the research effort that will be needed to develop scientific data of sufficient quality and quantity to support scientifically valid efforts to control accidents will be great—no smaller, certainly, than the magnitude of the research effort now being made to determine the causes and means of preventing cancer, heart disease, and mental illness. Meanwhile, much can be done on an empirical basis to accelerate the present slow but steady decline in accident rates.

There is presumptive evidence, at least, that intensive as well as extensive efforts to organize communitywide education programs can contribute to a marked decline in the number of deaths and injuries resulting from home accidents.

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Group Conferences

Since face-to-face, person-to-person communication is more apt to motivate people to act than communication using the printed word alone, the usefulness of the group conference technique is suggested.

Several reasons may be cited for limiting the use of the conference technique to housewives during the early stages of the development of a local accident prevention program:

1. Experience with the group conference technique has indicated that housewives are more conscientious in attending conferences than men.

2. Although many mothers now work, the great majority still remain at home during the day. As housewives they play a "guardian" role with respect to the children in the household and to oldsters as well.

3. The maternal instinct can serve as a source of motivation to influence the mother to attend group conferences on accident prevention and to apply the lessons learned there.

4. Group conferences can be fitted nicely into the framework of orthodox public health operations in most communities since many public health nurses already are skilled in group conference techniques. Public health nurses are accustomed to working with mothers.

Booklets on Accident Prevention

The Division of Special Health Services of the Public Health Service has available two booklets that can be used in conducting local group conferences in home accident prevention. These booklets will be released through the regional offices of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to State health departments for final distribution to local health departments.

The first booklet, entitled "One Way to Develop Local Home Accident Prevention Activities," describes the development of these activi-

ties. Four stages are suggested for introducing to public health workers or to housewives the principles and techniques that are important in the prevention of home accidents. Stage 1 provides for a series of weekly conferences at which subject matter contained in the second booklet may be discussed; stage 2 describes methods by which local resources may be identified; stage 3 gives three methods for determining the extent of the local home accident problem; and stage 4 lists eight typical activities that may be engaged in locally to provide experience and seasoning.

The second booklet, entitled "Home Accident Prevention Text," presents a digest of principles and techniques important in developing home accident prevention activities. Sixteen chapters describe the accident prevention problem, the various factors which contribute to accidents, and the roles that can be played by public health workers and physicians.

The guide and the text can provide local health officers with a useful digest of current material on home accidents, plus an organized method of presenting it to members of their staffs and then, through group conferences, to key persons in the community. Both booklets may be used to orient housewives to the problem of home accidents and to methods of preventing them.

The task of involving thousands of professional public health workers and millions of citizens in an all-out attack on accidents is a tremendous one. It can only be accomplished by attacking the problem simultaneously on many fronts.

Potential Anticancer Compounds

New, potential anticancer compounds will be produced by six research organizations under contract with the Public Health Service. The chemicals to be synthesized under these contracts are designed to interfere with the growth of cancer cells in various ways.

One group of compounds, known as antimetabolites, inhibits the growth of cancer cells by blocking certain metabolic reactions. These compounds bear enough resemblance to needed chemicals to be accepted by the cells, but they also differ enough to interfere with the cells' metabolic processes of self-repair and self-reproduction.

Laboratory tests have shown that when cancer cells use certain antimetabolites, cell repairs are faulty and the cells either fail to grow and multiply or they die.

Synthesis of hormonal substances constitutes another promising avenue of cancer research. Both male and female sex hormones hinder the growth of cancer cells by changing the hormone environment which the cells need to continue reproducing.

The chemicals to be synthesized by the six research organizations will be tested against three types of animal tumors. Any of the hormonal substances that show promise will be used in clinical studies which hospitals throughout the country are conducting in cooperation with the National Cancer Institute, Public Health Service.

Stanford Research Institute, Menlo Park, Calif.; Southern Research Institute, Birmingham, Ala.; Medical College of Virginia, Richmond; and Monadnock Research Institute, Inc., Antrim, N. H., will prepare various kinds of antimetabolites for evaluation as anticancer drugs. The Upjohn Co., Kalamazoo, Mich., and the University of Chicago will produce new hormonal substances in quantities sufficient for laboratory studies and clinical trials.

The six contracts involve an expenditure of approximately $793,000 and will be administered by the NCI Cancer Chemotherapy National Service Center.