

## VAN DIE REDAKSIE : EDITORIAL

## VERPLIGTE INENTING TEEN POLIOMIËLITIS

In 'n spesiale poliomiëlitis-uitgawe van die *Tydskrif* wat op 11 Mei 1963 verskyn het (37, 497-515), is sekere aspekte van die landswye inenting teen poliomiëlitis beskrywe. Gedurende hierdie veldtog, wat in Julie en September 1961 gevoer is, is oor die 21,000,000 dosisse van elk van die drie poliovirus tipes in monovalente, gekonsentreerde vorm, gelewer, wat later tot die regte konsentrasie verdun is vir gebruik in die veldwerk. Bykans 80% van die vatbare bevolking van alle rasse in ons land is toe ingeënt —'n dekking wat voldoende is om die siekte byna uit te wis. Ons het toe rede gehad om trots te voel op die bereikte prestasie.

Ons het toe egter ook gewaarsku dat die gebruik van so 'n doeltreffende middel op so 'n groot skaal, en die onvermydelike ingryping in die ewewig van die Natuur, groot verantwoordelikhede ontsluit. Aangesien die bron van natuurlike immuniteit grotendeels verwyder word met die uitwissing van die siekte, beteken dit dat persone wat nie ingeënt is nie, blootgestel word aan aanvalle waarteen hulle geen natuurlike of kunsmatige immuniteit het nie. Dit beteken dus in praktiese terme dat die vermeerdering van die vatbare bevolking met ongeveer 300,000 per jaar (as gevolg van geboortes en nuwe intrekkers) binne 'n kort tydspanne toestande kan skep wat die uitbreek van nuwe epidemies kan begunstig—epidemies wat selfs strawwer mag wees as toe die Natuur alleen in beheer was.

Na die inentingsveldtog het daar dus op elke ouer die verpligting gerus om sy kinders, wat sedertdien gebore is, te laat inent. Die stroom poliomiëlitisgevallen wat sedert die veldtog voorgekom het, het aangetoon dat dit veral

die ouderdomsgroep van een tot twee jaar is wat aange-tas word. Hiervan kan afgelei word dat 'n hele aantal babas, wat na die veldtog van 1961 gebore is, die maklik bekombare, lewende poliovirus-entstof nie ontvang het nie.

Nou word daar berig dat die Staatsdepartement van Gesondheid stappe gedoen het om dit verpligtend te maak dat mense teen polio geïmmuniseer word. Dit wil voorkom of die publiek onverskillig geword het teenoor poliomiëlitis omdat daar na die immuniseringsveldtog baie minder gevalle van die siekte voorgekom het as voorheen. Dit lyk asof baie ouers en voogde hul verantwoordelikhede teenoor hul kinders in hierdie verband nie nakom nie, niteenstaande die feit dat die onskadelike dog effektiewe slukmiddel kosteloos beskikbaar gestel word.

Die reaksie op die oproep om ouers en voogde te ooreed om vatbare kinders betyds te laat immuniseer, was teleurstellend. Die gevolg is dat daar jaarliks 'n toename was in die getal kinders wat nie geïmmuniseer is nie. In 1963 is byna vier keer soveel poliogevalle aangemeld as in 1962. Die meeste van hulle het geen slukmiddel gekry nie.

Die stap wat die Staatsgesondheidsdepartement gedoen het om immunisering teen polio verpligtend te maak, skyn dus onvermydelik te wees. Dwangmaatreëls alleen is egter nie genoeg nie. Die hele mediese profesie en alle plaaslike gesondheidsdepartemente, sowel as ingeligte lede van die publiek, moet onvermoeid voortgaan met volgehoue opvoeding in hierdie verband. Want slegs dan kan die hoop gekoester word dat poliomiëlitis nie net beheer sal word nie, maar ook heeltemal uitgewis sal word as 'n morbiditeits- en mortaliteitsfaktor.

## FAECAL REMEDIES

Ancient man was much impressed with the increased yields obtained from soil to which dung had been added. Animal and human excreta were therefore considered to possess magical powers. They were widely used by many people in a number of countries for a long time and, until quite recently, for the treatment of disease. Following special incantations and religious rites, elaborate preparation of faecal applications formed an important part of the treatment.<sup>1</sup>

The ancient Egyptian dreaded death, and in the belief that the excreta of man and animals was hateful to evil spirits he used faeces to counteract the influences that introduced disease to all parts of the body. The demon or messenger of the gods was sometimes threatened with the name of the remedy, and often it had to be used. At one time a recipe used by the priest-physicians included faeces from human or animal sources applied as a plaster to boils, or to the closed eyes in cases of trachoma. Of the 877 recipes on the Ebers Papyrus, 55 include the use of faeces. For the often fatal sting of the scorpion a mix-

ture of hippopotamus faeces, willow leaves, and honey was used by the ancient Egyptians.

In ancient Babylon the view was held that as long as blood, saliva, urine or faeces escaped from the body there was still hope of life. Therefore, the body fluids came to be used as therapeutic agents by the physicians. Witchdoctors in Africa have acted along similar lines; thus the Hottentot whose legs were failing him was treated by making an incision in his thigh, and into the wound faeces of the hyena were smeared, since this animal is a fast runner. For the restless child the excreta of the civet cat, a sleepy animal, were applied to a scratch made on the forehead. And since the elephant is a wise animal, what could be better than to administer its faeces externally or internally in the treatment of a deranged woman.

The Midrash recommended the application of animal faeces for the treatment of gout, and in the Talmud reference is made to various remedies including the use of resin and the faeces of a white dog for the treatment of pleurisy.

The Japanese at one time used an infusion of the excreta of the cricket for internal administration in the treatment of smallpox. They also thought the excreta of the silkworm to be beneficial in gonorrhoea. The Chinese used human excreta in their treatment of lung disease, indigestion, and skin disorders. Thus human faeces allowed to stand for some time sealed in bamboo and in pots were subsequently made into gilded pills for the treatment of pneumonia.

Respect for dirt and faeces persisted into the Middle Ages and was most colourfully demonstrated and used at the Feast of Fools celebrated yearly on Twelfth Night. Similar feasts were celebrated in England, Spain and Italy. The details of these interesting, riotous, and vulgar ceremonies are given in an absorbing book written by Böttcher,<sup>1</sup> who also traces the origin of this custom to the East, where even today the faeces of certain persons in high office are regarded as possessing supernatural powers. The smearing of dirt or paint on the face provided a mask behind which the individual could hide

from the demons of disease, and the casting of dung to the crowd at the Feast of Fools was giving to them the means for living another year of good health.

A very learned man, Paullini, not regarded as a charlatan, published his best work in Frankfurt-on-Main in 1696 entitled *Heylsamen Dreck-Apotheke*, in which he testified to the cures that could be obtained by the administration of faeces and urine internally and externally. Sometimes the 'antibiotic' material was used singly, sometimes as mixtures. Paullini quoted Pliny as stating that every farmer grows his pharmacopoeia in his yard behind his fences and on the dung heap. Certainly in modern times great research has been done to discover antibiotics from bacteria and fungi, with great success, but the chemotherapeutic agents available in the modern armamentarium are a far cry from the crude preparations haphazardly used in days gone by.

1. Böttcher, H. M. (1963): *Miracle Drugs: A History of Antibiotics*. London: Heinemann.