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Advice on Health (No. 126)

CANCER (2): Early Signs

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene, Health Department)

IN a previous article I pointed out that New Zealand continues to have a high cancer death rate because of delay—delay which was 75 per cent due to the patient. The patient's early symptoms were disregarded or unrecognised.

Everyone should know the essential facts. Cancer attacks anybody, young or old, although the majority of cases are in middle-aged and elderly people. It is a malignant growth which starts in one place in the body because of changes in the body cells. The cells skip their boundaries, multiply, and replace nearby healthy cells, which are destroyed. The key to the mystery of what causes these cell changes eludes medical science.

A cancer, once started, keeps on growing slowly or rapidly. It usually grows very slowly, and is painless in the early stages. Unless recognised while small, confined or "localised" in one spot, cancer will kill. Cells from the original growth are, in time carried by the lymph or blood stream, to other parts of the body, where they lodge and cause secondary cancers. But

cancer can be checked or cured if it is detected early enough.

Cancer may occur in any part of the body. However, usual sites are the skin, lips, tongue, gullet, stomach, large intestine, rectum, prostate gland, womb and breast. The generative organs and the breast are most frequently involved in women, and the stomach in men.

Danger Signals

These are the danger signals of cancer: any lump in any part of the body which comes painlessly or grows steadily; any sore or ulcer which fails to heal quickly under treatment; growths, moles, warts, scars, blemishes, which suddenly begin to change in either colour, size or texture; any irregular bleeding or unnatural discharge of blood or matter from the bowel, the genital organs, or other cavities of the body; any indigestion which doesn't stop quickly on sensible dieting or with simple remedies—any of these may be the beginning of cancer.

Cancer is not caused by germs which enter the body from outside. Therefore, the disease is not catching. Treatment

is more effective to-day than ever before, because of increased medical knowledge and skill in diagnosis, and because of better used X-rays, radium and surgery in treatment. In this country of ours, thousands owe their continued existence to the early and successful use of modern methods.

"The Great Hope"

The tragedy of cancer lies in the impossibility of unearthing early enough, certain deep-seated "silent" forms—they can't be seen or felt, being painless till such late stages that hope of cure is lost. Fortunately, these types form a minority of cancers. It is true, on the other hand, that if everyone could be induced to have periodical health examinations enough remediable cancers would be discovered at an early stage to bring down the death rate, and reduce, gratifyingly, illness and incapacity.

As yet, cancer cannot be cured by any regime or diet, and no known drug, medicine or serum will prevent its appearance or cure it when present. The great hope for cancer patients lies in recognising and treating the disease in its early stages. Suspect any lump, especially in the breast; any irregular bleeding or discharge; any sore that doesn't heal; persistent indigestion with loss of weight — and see a competent doctor at once

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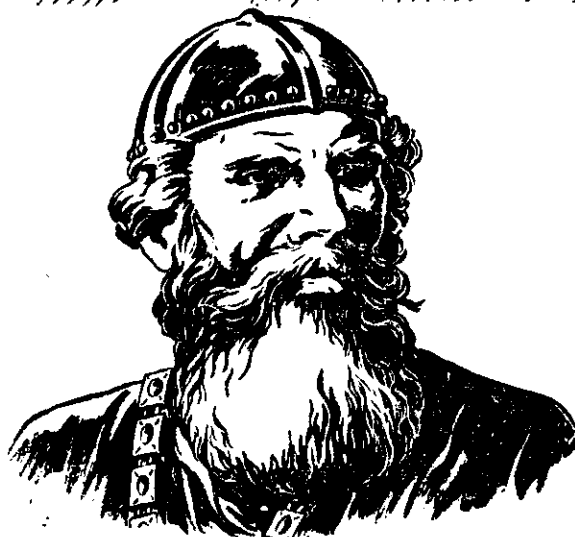
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