

THE PRUDENT ROAD TO HEALTH

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We seem to be developing a strange philosophy about health matters, wherein the fog of socio- medico-political theory steadily smothers reality. The health politicians, egged on by a few of medicine's own publicity-conscious opportunists and the visionary enthusiasts who write medical semi-fiction for the mass media, apparently foresee a nation of individuals without blemish or defect whose right to perfect health and eternal life will be guaranteed by science, research and government money. It will be a lovely existence. No woman need have an unwanted child. No defective child need ever be born. We will be immune to all infectious diseases. Cancer, along with heart disease and stroke, will be eliminated by Federal programs. The Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) will see to it that we are protected against all possible (and remotely possible) health hazards. In time, we may become incapable of dying.

It is interesting to recall here that the one reasoned attempt by Hitler and his Third Reich to produce a healthful nation of supermen, scientifically regulated through controlled breeding and elimination of defectives and undesirables, was not favorably viewed by the confused, starry-eyed backers of our health bureaucracy, who now, on the one hand, push legislation to banish tobacco smoking in the interest of cancer control and, on the other, protest the legal ban on marijuana smoking as an infringement of civil liberty.

In late October, with a fanfare reminiscent of the days of Arthur Fleming and the Great Cranberry Crisis, cyclamates were removed from the approved list of food additives. According to a series of statements released by Abbott Laboratories, Jesse L. Stienfeld, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs and HEW Secretary Robert H. Finch, the decision to ban cyclamates was based on a couple of research experiments involving rats and mice. In one study, cholesterol pellets with 20% sodium cyclamate were injected into the urinary bladders of Swiss mice, and 16 months later a "significantly increased number of urinary bladder tumors" were discovered. In the other, Abbott Laboratories, over a period of two years, was able to produce bladder malignancy in eight of an unspecified number of rats by feeding them massive doses (2,500 milligrams per kilogram) of cyclamate daily for the entire life of the animals.

Assuming that humans respond to cyclamate in the same fashion as rats, some beguiling observations can be made. A 70-kilogram adult (about 150 pounds) would have to ingest 175,000 milligrams (175 grams) daily to keep up with his brother rat. Since each 8 to 12-ounce diet drink may contain anywhere from 0.3 to 1.0 grams of cyclamate, our adult friend would have to drink 175 to 625 diet colas every day. In a 16-waking-hour

day, this amounts to 11 to 39 drinks per hour, or about one bottle every 1½ to 5 minutes, with no time out for lunch or trips to the bathroom.

Secretary Finch was kind enough to emphasize, “. . . in the strongest possible terms, we have no evidence at this point that cyclamates have indeed caused cancer in humans." Nor did he want his decision to be interpreted as a "life saving or emergency measure." "I have acted," said he, "under the provisions of law because it is imperative to follow a prudent course in all matters concerning public health."

The Secretary's cautious action immediately brought into question the safety of another additive dear to the hearts of cooks and the canning industry, monosodium glutamate (such as MSG and Accent). And shortly after the cyclamate ban, a news story headlined the fact that there are at least 325 other food additives that have never been adequately checked regarding their safety for human consumption, including, no doubt, salt and pepper. One hesitates to speculate also about the number of everyday foods that have never been scientifically tested along the same lines. Last month, in a further effort to protect the nation's health, Mr. Finch eliminated that terrible pesticide, DDT from general use.

But much remains to be done. We progress toward our goal of universal guaranteed health slowly, and each small step, which proscribes another possible cause of misery, should be applauded. In November, *TIME* magazine again alerted us to the shame that 42,000 American women develop cancer of the uterus each year, and that, like lung cancer to tobacco, there exists a definite causal relationship between uterine cancer and sexual intercourse. Perhaps it would not be wise at this point for Secretary Finch officially to ban intercourse. Yet he could, under the provisions of law, follow the prudent course and at least decree that all newborn female infants have tattooed across the suprapubic area the warning:

CAUTION: EXCESSIVE SEXUAL INTERCOURSE MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH.