

New "Weapon" in Battle Against Cancer

By

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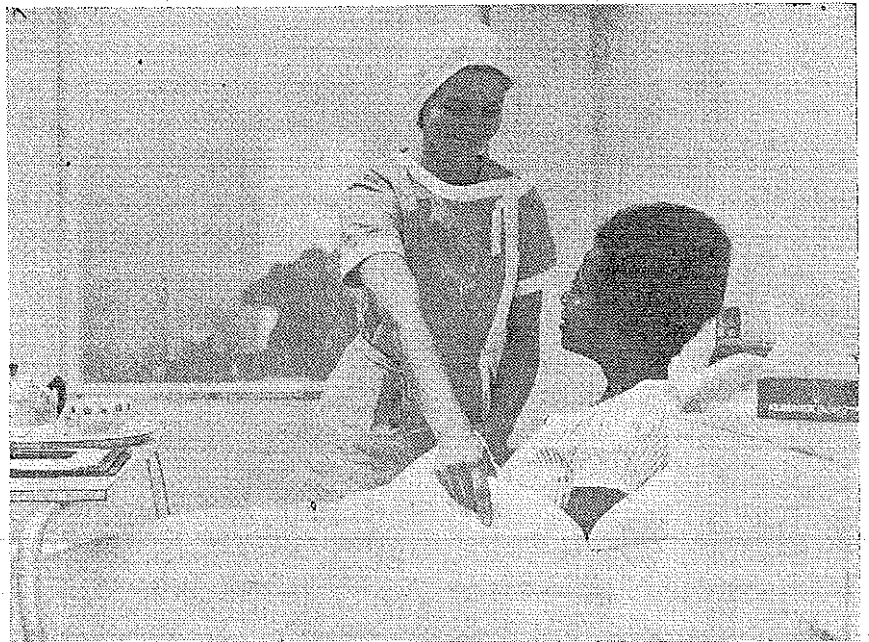
THE ward is called Alice. Why? Because, explains Doctor K.D. Bagshawe, the dark-haired, good-looking young physician in charge of it, "the name gives a more comforting first impression to patients than 'Sterile Unit'."

It is so called because conditions of perfect cleanliness are maintained in this unit at Fulham Hospital, London, for a new treatment which is gaining ground against a particularly deadly form of cancer.

Uncommon in Western Europe and North America but not in South-East Asia, China and parts of Africa, chorionepithelioma is a tumour of the womb that attacks some women after pregnancy. Until a few years ago it was nearly always fatal and one of the most tragic things about it was that it claimed its victims mostly among young married women, often the mothers of small children.

In about 1957 specialists in the United States found that a drug called methotrexate was very effective in the treatment of this disease. About a year later the story was taken a big step forward at Fulham Hospital, a new hospital in the Charing Cross Hospital group. There a patient desperately ill with chorionepithelioma was given the drug and another, called mercaptopurine. The result, says Dr. Bagshawe, was "very good: the patient is now leading a perfectly normal life." Since then some 40 cases have been treated and in more than 80 per cent of them there has been complete recovery.

A side effect of the treatment, however, is that while it is going on—but not afterwards—the patient is abnormally susceptible to infection. It was to minimise this hazard that the "Sterile Unit" came into being. In a new building adjoining the main hospital and incorporating its own laboratory it can accommodate eight patients under condi-



A patient in the special unit at Fulham Hospital, London

tions of maximum security against germs.

The building operation itself was an inspiring example of co-operation. Says the hospital's official record of the project: "The enthusiasm of the architects and the medical staff was transmitted to the contractor and his personnel, especially the foreman, whose personal efforts were tremendous and who imbued all who worked there with a great spirit of personal responsibility."

Manufacturers concerned with the project were generous, too. Some donated their products, others asked less than the normal price.

Opened only a few months ago, the unit is staffed by a team of specially-trained nurses. All are volunteers who spend their duty hours under conditions that put one in mind of a space-ship or an atomic submarine.

Their working environment is

behind germ-proof doors through which no unauthorised, unsterile person is allowed to pass. Even when the doctor has to talk to the sister-in-charge the conversation takes place through a polythene screen.

Before entering the sterile area, which comprises the rooms in which the patients live and those in which the nurses work, each nurse has to change into a special, freshly laundered uniform. Designed by a fashion expert, it consists of a gown, closely fitting cap, and nylon tights.

Because of the need to keep down the number of people entering the area to the barest minimum the nurses have to take on many tasks that are not normally carried out by the nursing staff. They prepare the patients' meals in the sterile kitchen, where food cooked in the hospital's diet kitchen is reheated in a micro-wave and infra-red oven



A corridor in the special unit at Fulham Hospital, London

which destroys bacteria in the centre of food as well as on the surface.

Uncooked food is selected for its germ-free qualities; fresh fruit is washed in an antiseptic solution. Each day the nurses wash down the

patients' rooms, again with antiseptic. They also pose patients for X-ray so that the radiographer can take the picture through a plastic screen without having to take herself or her equipment into the sterile area.

Because the patients have to spend up to six months in this complete physical isolation a lot of thought was put into finding ways of making life as pleasant as possible.

Each patient is nursed in a separate room, where attractive colour schemes make up for the absence of any furnishings likely to harbour germs. Even blinds and curtains are behind glass and the air, which is filtered, is kept at a high temperature to do away with the need for blankets.

Individual television sets have their controls by the bed but are sited behind glass just below ceiling level. This enables them to be taken out for servicing from a "walkway" constructed above the sterile area. Similar walkways below ground give access to the plumbing.

The rooms have large, germ-proof windows looking on to a "visitors' corridor" and the patients can talk with relatives and friends through an individual polythene panel. Visiting is unrestricted and, says, Dr. Bagshawe, "and we already have a flourishing husbands' club here."

The first unit of its kind, it is serving as a working model for the planning of others where treatments involved in transplanting organs, plastic surgery, and perhaps the curing of other forms of cancer may be carried out.

(A.B.I.S. Release)

S.N.A. SECRETARY'S ITINERARY

Members of the Kerala State Branch will be pleased to know of my forthcoming visit to their State. It shall be my endeavour to meet as many members (both T.N.A.I., H.V.L., M. & A.N.M.A. and the S.N.A.) as possible. My Programme is given below :

1.3.1965	Dep.	Delhi	14.3.1965	Dep.	Mundakappadam
4.3.1965	Arr.	Palghat	14.3.1965	Arr.	Tiruvalla
5.3.1965	Dep.	Palghat	15.3.1965	Halt	
5.3.1965	Arr.	Calicut	16.3.1965	Dep.	Tiruvalla
6.3.1965	Halt.		20.3.1965	Arr.	Mallappally
7.3.1965	Dep.	Calicut			Govt. Hospital
8.3.1965	Arr.	Trichur			Health Centre
9.3.1965	Dep.	Trichur	20.3.1965	Dep.	Mallappally
9.3.1965	Arr.	Ernakulam	20.3.1965	Arr.	Kotiyam
10.3.1965	Halt		21.3.1965	Halt	
11.3.1965	Dep.	Ernakulam	22.3.1965	Dep.	Kotiyam
11.3.1965	Arr.	Bharananganam	22.3.1965	Arr.	Trivandrum
12.3.1965	Dep.	Bharananganam	23.3.1965	Halt	
12.3.1965	Arr.	Kottayam	24.3.1965	Dep.	Trivandrum
13.3.1965	Halt.		25.3.1965	Arr.	Madras
14.3.1965	Dep.	Kottayam	26.3.1965	Dep.	Madras
14.3.1965	Arr.	Mundakappadam	28.3.1965	Arr.	New Delhi