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Summary Report — First International Medical Conference on Mental Retardation

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Summary Report — First International Medical Conference On Mental Retardation

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Current appraisal of problems in the field of mental retardation on a world basis marked the occasion of the First International Medical Conference on Mental Retardation in Portland, Maine, during the week of July 27-31, 1959. Organized in the relatively brief period of seven months, under the general chairmanship of Peter W. Bowman, M.D., Pownal, Maine, the Conference attracted physicians from 33 foreign countries and from 40 states in this country. Primarily a medical conference, the final half-day session was opened to members of allied professions.

Attendance totaled over 600 Conference participants. In addition, a large group of volunteer workers from the Woman's Auxiliary of the Cumberland County Medical Association, Greater Portland Association for Retarded Children, Pineland Parents and Friends Associates and other groups in the area provided hospitality, recreational and social aspects of the program. Wives and families of the delegates added another significant figure to the total of visitors attending Conference social events.

In addition to emphasizing the great need for continued research in the area of mental deficiency, the principal aim of the Conference was to take steps toward forming a permanent organization to continue this work. Early in the Conference period, a small group of physicians representing leading countries of the world met at the call of Howard V. Bair, M.D., Parsons, Kansas — a member of the Conference Program Committee — to explore ways and means of effecting this goal. After an evening's deliberation, it was voted to establish a permanent organization and to hold the Second International Medical Conference on Mental Retardation in Vienna, Austria, in 1961. Dr. K. Kundratitz, Professor of Pediatrics, University of Vienna, was named chairman of the Conference Committee. Also named to the Committee were: J. D. Spillane, M.D., Cardiff, Wales; H. Bickel, M.D., Marburg, Germany; H. Asperger, M.D., Innsbruck, Austria; T. Arneus, M.D., Stockholm, Sweden; S. Nielson, M.D., Copenhagen, Denmark; G. Frontali, M.D., Rome, Italy; F. Groer, M.D., Warsaw, Poland; A. Minkowski, M.D., Paris, France; A. Chattas, M.D., Cordoba, Argentina; Peter W. Bowman, M.D., and Hans Mautner, M.D., Pownal, Maine, USA.

The general structure of the Conference was that of plenary sessions held daily during which scientific papers were presented, followed by a general discussion period led by Hans V. Mautner, M.D., Pownal, Maine, who served as program chairman for the Conference. In all, 35 main speakers participated in the program.

Following is a brief summary of these papers: A report about pathological findings in the brain of mentally retarded patients — Paul I. Yakovlev, M.D., Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts; Malformations produced in animals by abnormal food, poisons, or other types of damage — J. Warkany, M.D., University of Cincinnati, Ohio; Inborn metabolic errors explained by abnormalities in the enzyme function — D. Y. Y. Hsia, M.D., Northwestern University, Chicago, Ill.; Report on experiments concerning autonomic regulation in the brain, the complexities of this regulation and its relation to emotion and mental development — E. Gellhorn, M.D., University of Minnesota, Minn.; A report on experiments demonstrating animal behaviour following damage to different parts of the brain — W. R. Ingram, M.D., and I. R. Knott, M.D., University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa; Normal and abnormal electrogenesis in the fetal brain — F. Morrell, M.D., W. Bradley, M.D., T. Kaiser, M.D., University of Minnesota, Minn.; Pathological findings in birth trauma and asphyxia, the mechanical bases, and proposals for prophylaxis — Philip Schwartz, M.D., Warren State School, Pa.; The relation of breathing in the newborn to the acid-base equilibrium and its importance for asphyxia — L. S. James, M.D., Columbia University Presbyterian Medical Center, New York; Observations in differences of metabolism and oxygen utilization in animals before and after birth — W. A. Himwich, M.D., Galesburg State Research Hospital, Ill.; Complications of pregnancy and mental deficiency — B. Pasamanick, M.D. and H. Knobloch, M.D., University Health Center, Colum-

bus, Ohio; Common malformations of skull and spine in the region of the foramen magnum — J. D. Spillane, M.D., University of Cardiff, Wales; The Treacher Collins syndrome and mental deficiency — L. Kulczycki, M.D., Harvard University, Boston, Mass.; Sequels of infectious disease of the central nervous system on mental development and the common personality changes — H. Asperger, M.D., University of Innsbruck, Austria; Prenatal infections and their results in mental development and malformation — J. Sutter, M. D., University of Alger, Algeria; Present knowledge of metabolism of the amino acids and the diseases which are now considered to be related to abnormalities in the amino acid metabolism — Richmond S. Paine, M.D., Harvard Medical School, Boston, Mass.; A report of a nine-year experiment on phenylalanine low diet in phenylketonuria — H. Bickel, M.D., University of Marburg, Germany; A survey on the chemical background of lipid thesauroses, including gargoylism — P. B. Diezel, M.D., University of Heidelburg, Germany; A report on metabolism of copper, iron, and lead and about related diseases with mental deterioration, — also a paper on chemical base of phenylketonuria — J. N. Cumings, M.D., University of London, England; A tolerance test in phenylketonurics with p-Hydroxy Phenylpyruvic Acid — H. D. Grumer, M.D., Pownal, Maine; Phenylketonuria — H. A. Waisman, M.D., University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin; Autonomic responsiveness in newborn and older children — E. W. Gordon, M.D., Brooklyn, N. Y.; The detection of amino-aciduria in retarded children by a simple rapid method — H. Ghadimi, M.D., and H. Shwachman, M.D., Children's Medical Center, Boston, Mass.; Present knowledge of the pathology and physiology of mongolism — C. E. Benda, Clark University, Worcester, Mass.; Etiological aspects of mongolism — J. Oster, M.D., Central Hospital, Randers, Denmark; Erythroblastosis as base of mental retardation — W. W. Zuelzer, M.D., Wayne State University, Detroit, Mich.; Kernicterus — H. S. Baar, M.D., Pownal, Maine; The congenital nervous system in congenital heart diseases — M. M. Cohen, M.D., University of Minnesota, Minn.; Observations on the possibility of drug treatment, fever therapy, irradiation in mental deficiency — K. Kundratitz, M.D., University of Vienna, Austria; Possible surgical therapy in mentally retarded children, especially in hydrocephalus — J. M. Tarlov, M.D., New York Medical College, New York; Recent findings of chromosomal abnormalities in mentally retarded persons — P. E. Polani, M.D., Guy's Hospital, London, England; Diagnostic and therapeutic aspects of childhood schizophrenia — L. Bender, M.D., State Department of Mental Hygiene, New York; Differential diagnosis of autism, childhood schizophrenia and Heller's Disease — C. E. Benda, M.D.; Etiology and treatment of children in a typical development (childhood psychoses) — P. H. Gates, M. D., James Jackson Putnam Children's Center, Boston, Mass.; Mental retardation as part of the training program in child psychiatry — G. E. Gardner, M.D., Judge Baker Guidance Center, Boston, Mass.; Behavior problems in brain damaged children — H. Asperger, M. D.

Session leaders were: John W. Gerrard, M.D., University of Saskatchewan, Canada; G. Jervis, M.D., Letchworth Village, Thiells, New York; Asbjörn Fölling, M.D., Tvedestrand, Norway; G. Frontali, M.D., University of Rome, Italy; A. Minkowski, M.D., Paris, France.

Scientific displays featured the subjects of phenylketonuria, exhibited by Willard R. Centerwall, M.D., Los Angeles, California; A simple method for the detection of amino-aciduria — exhibited by Drs. Ghadimi and Shwachman, Children's Medical Center, Boston; A dietary treatment of phenylketonuria — by Richmond S. Paine, M.D., Harvard Medical School; Some rare types of mental deficiency — the exhibit of the Pineland Hospital and Training Center, Pownal; Toxoplasmosis — exhibited by H. S. Baar, M.D., Pownal; Atarax in the treatment of mentally retarded children — exhibited by Charles H. Carter, M.D., Gainsville, Florida; Acrocephalo syndactyly — by Hedwig H. Holzer, M.D., State School, Taunton, Mass.; Developmental abnormalities in the region of the foramen magnum — by J. D. Spillane, M.D., Cardiff, Wales. These, together with several commercial exhibits, were largely attended by the delegates during the visiting periods set aside for exhibit viewing each day.

Films also proved most popular, the daily viewings attracting an average of some 100 delegates. Films shown were: "Clinical Types of Mental Deficiency"; "Disorders of Gait"; "Electroencephalogram"; "Abnormal Involuntary Movements"; "Dentistry In The Handicapped Child"; "Behaviour Disturbances after Bilateral Removal of the Frontal Areas of the Cortex of Cats"; "Intelligence in White Rats"; "Role of Hypothalamus in Emotion and Behaviour."

Concluding on the following high note, the Conference delegates voted unanimously on a resolution "to recommend to all Governments of the World that sufficient funds be provided in their annual budgets for improvement and deepening of our present knowledge of Mental Retardation, and to further its medical treatment, its social and educational needs, its research; and to create a better understanding for the psychological, social, economic, legal and medical needs of the mentally retarded individual."

Queried as to his opinion as to the most important result of the Conference, one of the leaders stated — in part: "Progress in our knowledge about mental deficiency . . . will only come from hard clinical and laboratory work. The basic sciences are of primary importance. . . . If Dr. Fölling had not observed 25 years ago that the urine of some idiots turns green when ferric chloride is added, Jervis ten years later could not have shown that these patients have a lack of the enzyme which exidases phenylalanine to tyrosine, and again — ten years later, Bickel would not have been able to

treat these patients with the adequate diet so that they do not develop into idiots, but rather, into more or less useful members of society. Similar things have been known for a long time in respect to cretins. . . . Some will ask: 'Is so much research necessary for such meagre results?' The results do not remain meagre when looked at from the point of view of the patients, or even better, the parents. . . ."

The proceedings of the Conference will be published and should be available by early Spring of 1960. These will include the printing of all scientific papers in full, together with the ensuing discussions.