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Lead Poisoning 2. A report of Recent Cases*

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INTRODUCTION:

The evidence gathered in 1964 by Drs. Kopelman and Charney of the University of Rochester Medical Center, and summarized in the first RCSI informational report on lead poisoning, made it clear that a significant menace to the health of young children living in substandard housing existed in Rochester. This menace was lead poisoning which can be acquired through eating the lead-containing paint and putty that flakes from the inner surfaces of dilapidated buildings.

It is the purpose of this report to present direct evidence that this problem still exists in the City of Rochester's population.

FINDINGS:

The Pediatric Department was contacted and through the help of House Officers and Out-Patient Clinic staff and records, it was possible to locate the names of 9 children ranging in age between 2 and 6 years who are now being treated on an out-patient basis for clinically significant lead poisoning. There is no way of knowing, at present, whether more cases remain to be discovered, or how many more there maybe.

It is significant that 3 children of one family and 2 children of another were poisoned. There were no deaths in the group and in general the indications are that all children will respond favorably to treatment. One child, for instance, came to the hospital in convulsions and delirium, and is now alert. However, at present, it is too early to predict whether there will be a residual impairment of health. Residual effects do occur in some cases of lead poisoning, the symptoms of which include convulsions and developmental retardation.

The children lived both in the Third and Seventh Ward where poor housing conditions are known to exist.

CONCLUSIONS:

A serious menace to the health of pre-school children continues to exist in the City of Rochester, which will only be eliminated by aggressive control over the conditions of the interior surfaces of dilapidated housing in slum areas.

COMMITTEE PLANS:

1. A case finding program will be instituted to document more clearly the extent of this problem.
2. A survey to detect housing units which through inadequate repair provide a potentially lethal source of lead-containing debris has begun.

It is hoped that this will limit the possibilities of death or permanent physical and/or intellectual disability of the lead intoxicated children.

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Lead Poisoning Subcommittee