

## Pillow Talk

Ever since U.S. hospital authorities learned, to their horror, that dangerous, penicillin-resistant strains of *Staphylococcus* bacteria were floating merrily in supposedly sterile hospital corridors, no nook or cranny has escaped attention from sanitation experts. Faulty air-conditioning systems, surgical masks, dirty mopheads and bedside water carafes have been implicated as germ carriers. In a speech to last week's American Public Health Association conference in San Francisco, Dr. Howard E. Lind of Brookline, Mass. proposed another target for bug hunters: the pillows on patients' beds.

At Brookline's Brooks Hospital, Dr. Lind examined feathers in pillow stuffings that had been "sanitized" (washed, heat-treated and chemically disinfected) to Government standards. He found huge amounts of residual bacteria: up to 13 million organisms per gram. Most are probably harmless to humans, but at least three diseases—including psittacosis, or "parrot fever"—can be transmitted to humans from fowl; all three can be spread by feathers from infected birds.

Dr. Lind found more than germs inside old hospital pillows. Items that turned up amid the feathers: stones, corn, glass, metal strips, nails, a broken thermometer, false teeth, wax crayons, a pencil, a chocolate bar, a chicken neck, hen manure, a dead sparrow, a rat skull and a whole mouse. Even if feathers prove to be poor disease carriers, concluded Lind dryly, "we should consider that the renovation of old feather pillows is of importance from the standpoint of general good housekeeping and psychological effect."

## Spines of Steel

Some ailments seem almost preferable to their cures. A case in point is scoliosis, an abnormal curvature of the spine that occurs in childhood. As seen from behind, the spine should appear straight; in scoliosis it has a C-shaped or S-shaped curve. Extreme cases of scoliosis often require fusion of the spinal vertebrae. For most cases the standard treatment is forcible straightening of the spine, with the patient encased for four to six months in a massive, immobilizing plaster cast. To some parents of scoliosis victims, this treatment seems so punishing that they cannot be persuaded to permit it even to save their children from permanent deformity.

Last week Houston Surgeon Paul Harrington was winning converts to a new and happier method. Capable of correcting spinal curvature in people up to the age of 40, Dr. Harrington's technique frees patients from the confines of a cast, permits them to lead normal lives during treatment. Key to Harrington's method is a slender, stainless-steel rod that resembles a soda straw and serves somewhat like a splint. In a complicated, two-hour operation, the curved spine is straightened, then bound into place with one to three



Harry Reel

**DR. LIND**  
Nokay to false teeth in the feathers.

rods, which are fastened to the spine with metal hooks.

The rods are readily accepted by the body, says Dr. Harrington, and need never be removed. Affixed to the spine just beneath the back muscles, they cause no pain, do not restrict physical activity. After ten days in the hospital and a six-week convalescent period, says Surgeon Harrington, youngsters equipped with rods can run, swim, play tennis. The only restriction: no contact sports such as football.



Owen Johnson

**SURGEON HARRINGTON**  
Okay if you don't play football.

## Most Wanted Virus

Few diseases are more mysterious than viral hepatitis—a liver inflammation for which there is no known cure, caused by at least two elusive viruses that no scientist has ever seen. Operating under a dozen aliases (e.g., bilious attack, acute yellow atrophy), hepatitis has occasionally been confused with such unrelated ailments as malaria and mononucleosis. It was once believed to be a penalty for excessive drinking. During World War II hepatitis was epidemic in the armed forces of the major combatants as well as in many civilian populations, and more than 170,000 cases were reported in the U.S. Army alone. Because of the difficulties of diagnosis, and because the Public Health Service kept no statistics on the disease until 1952, peacetime outbreaks were thought to be relatively few and largely limited to overcrowded orphanages, mental hospitals and prisons.

But by last week, as the PHS recorded 944 new cases across the nation, hepatitis had become the third most common reportable disease in the U.S.—behind measles and strep-scarlet fever—and a full-blown menace to health.

**Four for One.** The latest PHS figures, which cover the third week in October, bring to 31,259 the number of hepatitis cases reported in the U.S. so far this year, and the year-end total is expected to fall shy only of 1954's record 50,093. Reported cases are believed to be only a fraction of the actual total; Kentucky Epidemiologist J. Clifford Todd estimates that there have been four victims in his state—with 1,628 cases, the nation's hardest hit—for every one reported. In Colorado's heavy Mexican-American counties along the Arkansas River, the hepatitis rate is so high that the state's 1960 toll (903 cases) already is the worst in its history. Oregon has reported 950 cases.

Physicians make a sharp distinction between infectious hepatitis, usually spread by fecal matter, and the relatively rare serum hepatitis, or "needle jaundice," which is carried only by the blood, and therefore contracted from transfusions or improperly sterilized hypodermic needles. Infectious hepatitis can be spread in a number of ways. A disastrous epidemic struck Delhi, India early in 1956, when a huge sewage canal overflowed into the Jumna River, from which both Old and New Delhi draw water. Within eight weeks, 30,000 cases and 420 deaths were recorded. Sewage-contaminated water has been blamed for small outbreaks this year in Nicholas County, W. Va., and Hawkins County, Tenn. But the PHS says that most infectious hepatitis is transmitted by person-to-person contact, e.g., by small children who forget to wash their hands after they go to the toilet.

The infectious variety takes two to three weeks to develop. Common symptoms are jaundice, headache, fever (up to 104°), nausea, loss of appetite, diarrhea, enlarged liver, mental depression. Unlike any other contagious disease, hepatitis is harder on women than men. Only about three