

Psychosomatic Views On Allergies Assailed

By JOHN F. ALLEN

If father breaks out with hives it is not because he is secretly annoyed over mother wearing the family's pants; if junior wheezes asthmatically it does not mean he has been psychologically rejected by his parents.

As a matter of fact, the whole modern medical concept that allergic diseases are a manifestation of emotional disturbances is more an admission of scientific ignorance than a proved point of view.

These reflections on psychiatrists and lazy diagnosticians were made here yesterday by Dr. M. Coleman Harris, of San Francisco, a past president of the California Society of Allergy.

SCORES READ.

His paper was one of the highlights among scores read before the eighty-fourth annual meeting of the California Medical Association, which this week has drawn some 4,000 of the State's foremost physicians and surgeons to San Francisco.

In yesterday's sessions the two major topics featured in the various papers were allergies and the reading habits of children.

On the latter subject there were experts who both agreed and disagreed with Rudolf Flesch, whose controversial book, "Why Johnny Can't Read," is to run in The Examiner on three successive Sundays starting May 15.

MAY BE RESULT.

Doctor Harris called the tendency to blame asthma, hay fever, hives and other allergic diseases on psychosomatic upsets "a cover-up for a lot of our ignorance."

"Parent rejection of children with allergic diseases may actually be an effect rather than a cause," he said. "The mother who has an allergic, sniffling, sick kid may come to reject him as a result."

As proof of his thesis, Doctor Harris pointed to the fact that of 6,986 juveniles examined at San Francisco's Youth Guidance Center in 1954, only five (six one hundredths of 1 per cent) had bronchial asthma.

In the total juvenile population, from 4 to 5 per cent have bronchial asthma.

"These are kids in trouble, kids who certainly could be judged to have been rejected by their parents or to have other psychic trauma," Doctor Harris said.

"On the basis of the psychiatric evaluation, we could say, looking at these statistics that it's good to be a rejected child, that it appears to help in allergic diseases."

PLAY A PART.

On a more serious note, Doctor Harris was ready to admit that psychic disturbances certainly play a part in allergies, but that the basic—and treat-

able—causes remain pollen, food, fungi, infections and such household environmental factors as dust, feathers, wool and the like.

On the same subject, Dr. D. Edward Frank, a Los Angeles allergy expert, described the successful use of cortisone on twenty-seven asthmatics and five patients suffering from nervous skin outbreaks.

All were patients who had failed to respond to routine allergy treatment.

Doctor Frank admitted he did not know why the cortisone worked. In order to offset the cortisone doses—heavier than those given for rheumatoid arthritis—he fed his patients male and female sex hormones, which controlled such side effects as excessive hair growth, weight gain and swelling of the extremities.

HEADACHES CITED.

In a discussion of allergic headaches, Dr. Harold N. Perelson, of the University of Southern California medical school, tended to take the same anti-psychiatric angle as Doctor Harris.

"Medicine is so dominated by the psychosomatic theory," he said, "that we tend to forget that headaches can be caused by foods, house dust, feathers and even low blood sugar levels."

While admitting that emotional attacks can trigger asthmatic attacks and allergic headaches, Doctor Perelson said a great many of them are caused by such foods as wheat, eggs, milk, chocolate, onions, beans, nuts, pork and peas.

In the matter of junior's reading habits, Dr. Kenneth A. Grow, a Beverly Hills physician, agreed with Flesch to the extent of blaming the problem largely on teaching methods.

"Characteristically," he said, "children with poor reading habits are of average or better than average intelligence. They are often poor in writing and spelling, but excel in arithmetic, arts and manual arts."

"Usually it is a familiar matter, occurring more frequently in boys, and left handedness and ambidexterity are common."

FAMILIAR CONCEPTS.

He suggested as a way out:

"A return to the earliest concepts of teaching is essential. Apparently most cases of reading disability result from the use of a limited, uniform, visual method of teaching."

"Such children must use all of the clues available to them, by using individual letters of the alphabet and building these into combinations of sounds and syllables, then into words that are seen, spoken, heard and written."

The anti-Flesch point of view was taken by Dr. Leo Cain of San Francisco State College.

Cain pointed out the obvious

WEATHER MILD IN WIDE AREA

By the Associated Press

Scattered showers and thunderstorms dotted the Nation's midsection today from the northern Great Lakes region to north central Texas and six inches of snow fell in central Nevada.

Otherwise the Nation gener-

fact that there is a widespread belief that Johnny is not learning to read as well as his father and grandfathers did, and that the schools "are delinquent in providing an adequate education for our future citizens."

NOT THE SAME.

"What the layman fails to realize," Cain said, "is the fact that the school problem today is not the same as it was a generation ago."

"Today we have ninety-eight out of every 100 pupils moving from grammar school into high school, where in former years only one of every two even moved from the fourth into the fifth grade."

"No longer do the children who formerly failed to learn to read stop school; they are required by law to remain with the school population."

He also blamed radio, movies and television as visual and auditory means of obtaining information, means which obviously cut down on the necessity from obtaining information through reading.