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SPOTLIGHT ON POLIO:

Over the children of Britain, as early summer draws near, a cloud gathers. Poliomyelitis (believe many knowledgeable persons,) may reach epidemic proportions. Hence, upon the Ministry of Health, focuses much sharply critical attention. Not shirking the issue the Minister, Mr. Denis Vesper prepared a Public statement. High medical opinion says there is no scientific reason to regard an epidemic as likely. Laboratory preparation on the British type of Anti-Polio vaccine proceeds as fast as possible, but it is unavoidably a slow business. Absolute purity alone gaurentees that the finished vaccine will be safe. The virus of Polio is cultivated in the Kidney of the Rhesus Monkey. By the most strigent testing it has to be ensured that not even minute specks of infected tissue remain in the vaccine. The British type of product is a modification of the vaccine discovered in America by Dr. Salk.

At the university where much of the research that led to Dr. Salk's triumph was carried out, the great scientist was publicly thanked and congratulated by President Eisenhower. This Salk vaccine (say critics of official medical policy) should be imported without delay into Britain.

"When I think of all those agencies that these people will be spared, as they see loved ones in bed, I must say to you I have no words in which to adequately express the thanks of myself, all the people I know, and all 164,000,000 Americans to say nothing of all the other people in the world who will profit from your discovery. I am very very happy to hand this to you".

At many centres in Britain, children between the ages of two and nine are being inoculated with vaccine produced in this country. If the original plan to suspend inoculation in June were carried out, about one million children on the registered list would be left waiting.

Parallel with inoculation goes an elaborate testing research. Blood specimens of children who have had the serum are examined, to find out the effects and progress of the treatment. The discovery of the vaccine being comparatively recent, medical science is neglecting no possible source of knowledge. In America a faultily manufactured batch of the Salk vaccine (in the earliest days) infected about two hundred children, a tragedy underlining the vital importance of taking the upmost care.

The Iron Lung (this one at Neasden, London, is the world's most up-to-date model) is the only way of keeping alive Polio patients who are unable to breath themselves. This is Polio in perhaps it worst form. The Iron Lung gives artificial respiration mechanically. But for this apparatus, with its life-giving pump, the patient could not live.

The rocking bed quickens the blood circulation of patients who have been several hours in the Iron Lung. The bed is a new idea. The stronger the circulation the better is the sufferer able to fight the disease. Little Janice Holloway, aged three, is making good progress. Had the vaccine been discovered earlier she wouldn't have had Polio. Now they are building up the muscles again. May she be completely cured.

Another little sufferer, aged eight, is on the way to substantial recovery also.

At Cobham, in the hostel conducted by the Infantile Paralysis Fellowship, live several polio sufferers, happier there (like Leslie Wager) than struggling on the outside world. Amazingly despite his affliction, he makes jewellery.

Polio is sometimes quite merciless. Elizabeth Higgins is 33. She was a ballet dancer until four years ago. Almost always Polio sufferers was brave people, determined to rise above the handicap of their terrible disease. Here at Cobham, they prove, what doctors tell us, that self-help and determination, as much as anything else, keep the patients going. Had these people given way to self-pity (and who could have blamed them if they had) they might be bed-ridden today.

Unregarded by the chess-players sat 24-year-old Mary Gloud. And what wonderful courage and will-power are behind her success. For Mary, using an electric typewriter, writes short stories. She never seems to pause and reflect, if only there had been a vaccine when she was a toddler.

The children cannot protect themselves. But now that the vaccine has been discovered they can be safe-guarded. Master Timothy Roberts hadn't the faintest idea what it is all about, when we interviewed his mother. We put to her this question:

Interviewer: "Do you want to have your child inoculated against Polio?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Johnny's three, and is very nearly my whole life. Of course, I want him inoculated but I don't believe in getting scared about Polio or mothers would never have a moment's peace. What we have to do is to take proper precautions".

For millions of youngsters in all the joys of childhood, science has discovered a safeguard against the ghastly Polio that all but ruins its victims life. All possible protection must be theirs.