

Second wave of post-polio in Australia?

Professor Elizabeth Dean, prominent post-polio researcher, who has presented several seminars to the Network, was quoted by Canada NewsWire (15/3/04) as predicting a second wave of people with post-polio syndrome in Canada. This is due to the large number of migrants from countries where polio is, or was until recently, endemic eg India, Pakistan the Middle East and Africa. Many of these people had polio when they were young and are unaware that *they may face the challenges of post-polio syndrome. Immigration support groups need to be alerted to post-polio clinics and their role*, says Dean. From emails to *Ask Mary* it is apparent that some Asian polio survivors who have migrated to Australia do not know that they had polio. As they try to make sense of the onset of post-polio symptoms they begin to recall vague stories of a childhood illness and to wonder what really caused mild polio symptoms they have lived with since childhood.

Polio vaccine caused AIDS theory is finally dead

In three previous issues (43, 45, 46) I have discussed increasing evidence against this theory but it still receives publicity as in a recent TV showing of *The River*. This was based on the book of the same name by Edward Hopper who maintains that an AIDS-like virus (SIV) from African chimpanzees contaminated polio vaccine grown on tissue cultures of chimps in the 1950s. An article in *Nature* (22/4/04), describes how Michael Worobey and his colleagues collected faecal samples from chimps in the Congo to obtain SIV viral genetic material. Analysis proved that that SIV was highly divergent from HIV, confirming that chimps were not the source of the crossover of SIV to humans. Worobey said that his final proof was necessary because previous evidence against the theory was indirect. Such evidence included lack of any chimp DNA in the archival stocks of polio vaccine and evidence that HIV originated at least 30 years before polio vaccine was manufactured. *It would be nice*, Worobey said in an interview, *if these findings could eliminate some of the fears and suspicions that hang over polio vaccines currently in [use in] countries like Nigeria. Polio vaccines weren't infected with AIDS viruses in the 1950s, and they're not now either, and driving that message home can only be a good thing.*

Contaminated Soviet polio vaccine

Soon after the release of the above story the journal *New Scientist* (July 2004) published findings, which were reported in many newspapers, that as late as the 1980s some polio vaccine produced in the Soviet Union was contaminated with monkey virus SV40. This vaccine was used throughout the Soviet bloc and probably exported to China, Japan and parts of Africa. The consequences of exposure to the virus are unclear. There have been claims the SV40 virus may be linked to rare cancers but this has not been proved. In 1981 the Soviet switched to a polio vaccine 'seed' free of SV40 that was provided by the World Health Organisation.

Polio and a life of crime

I find references to polio in novels intriguing because of the attitudes they convey and the messages they may give readers. *'Doctored evidence'* is the most recent addition to a series of very enjoyable detective stories set in Venice, by Donna Leon. The murderer in this novel is thought to be a past member of the School Board and to have been blackmailed by the murder victim. A detective describes to Commissario Brunetti the various Board members but has left one out. Brunetti asks:

'And the other?'

'He's in a wheelchair.'

'What?'

'He's the guy who got polio when he went to India. You read about him, didn't you?'

The story rang a faint bell, though Brunetti had forgotten the details. 'Yes, I remember something. How long ago did it happen? About five years?'

'Six. He got sick while he was there, and by the time they managed to diagnose it, it was too late to evacuate him, so he was treated there, and now he's in a wheelchair....That might not be enough for you to exclude him, but I think a man might have other things to think about after landing in a wheelchair than continuing to pay blackmail'

... 'I think I'd like to talk to the one who's not in a wheelchair. The rugby player'.

Will this exchange remind readers to have their polio shots before travelling to India? Should polio survivors who use wheelchairs feel safer from detection if they embark on a criminal career? Leon makes no further reference to the polio survivor and unlike other School Board members he is not even given a name. That's the problem: people consider that being in a wheelchair is all there is to say about such a person; they believe that being in a wheelchair is of itself a full time occupation.

Death of Hugh Gallagher

American polio survivor, Hugh Gallagher, died in July. He contracted polio aged 19 and spent three months in an iron lung. On one occasion it broke down and he had to instruct the agitated nurses on how to pump the lung by hand. Gallagher played a vital role in the development and drafting of the US legislation, *The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968*. This was the precursor of the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990*. Gallagher's autobiography, *Blackbird Fly Away*, was reviewed in *Newsletter 41, 1999*. His best known book is *FDR's Splendid Deception* which describes how President Roosevelt hid his disability. Among 35,000 photographs of Roosevelt in his presidential library Gallagher found only two showing him in his wheelchair. Gallagher said he understood Roosevelt's stoicism and near-disavowal of his disability because he himself had lived much of his life in the same way. *For years I tried to work harder than any able-bodied person would. My drive to become a super hero exacted a terrible price. I paid no attention to my emotions. I became an automaton.* Gallagher played a major role in having a statue of Roosevelt in his wheelchair added to the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington. *'Don't let them steal our hero!'* he repeatedly told reporters during this campaign. In another book, *By Trust Betrayed*, Gallagher wrote about the rarely remembered thousands of people with disabilities who were exterminated by Germany in the Holocaust.

'Polio victim ousts Philippine political clan'

This headline in *The Straits Times* (31/5/04) recounts the victory of 40 year old accountant Grace Padaca who has just been elected governor of Isabela, one of the largest provinces in the Philippines. The paper described the win as a *Cinderella story...With just half a million pesos (\$US15,000) in donations and a core volunteer group of 15 youths, Ms Padaca....hailed her crutches into a beat-up van to campaign among the largely agricultural province's 1.4 million voters.* She defeated Faustino Dy, heir to a logging and construction magnate whose family had ruled the province for over 30 years. The article went on to say that, *In a political system dominated by all-powerful political clans, Ms Padaca is a symbol of democratic reform.*

Post-polio syndrome recognised by European Parliament

In the *Lancet* (1/1/04) Xavior Bosch reported: *Representatives of patients with post-polio syndrome (PPS) gathered on Nov 12 [2003] at the European Parliament in Brussels to bring this poorly understood disorder to the attention of health professionals and policy makers. At the meeting—which was supported by 20 members of the European Parliament—PPS organisations agreed to create the European Polio Union with the aim of obtaining recognition and funding from the European Parliament and Commission. There are thought to be 250,000 patients with PPS in Europe and 20 million worldwide....Although WHO declared in June that Europe was free of poliomyelitis, 'the other side of the coin is that there are very few health professionals practising today who have seen acute poliomyelitis' says Bijttebier [chairman of the Belgian PPS organisation]. Jim Costello, the chairman of the Irish PPS groups—the only EU country where PPS associations receive public funds—says 'our mission is to create awareness and to provide information regarding PPS among both polio survivors and the wider medical profession'.*

Melbourne iron lung user's 78th birthday

Melbourne polio survivor, June Middleton, celebrated her 78th birthday recently at the Austin Hospital, Melbourne. June contracted polio in 1949 when she was 23 years old and spends 16 hours a day in an iron lung. She also uses a portable respirator and goes for occasional outings in a specially fitted van. *The Age* (9/5/04) told her story under the headline, 'Iron grip of a forgotten disease'. June moves the index finger of her left hand, rolls her eyes and pokes her tongue to show the only other movement possible to her. The [Australian Ventilator users] Network has been lobbying the State Government for funds for a long-promised 20-bed supported housing development on a site, already purchased, in Thornbury.

Nigeria reels from new cases of polio

By July 2nd there had been 62 new cases of polio in Nigeria in the preceding fortnight bringing the total number of Nigerian cases for the year to 259. Health officials were waiting for results of tests on an additional 85 paralysed children. The 259 Nigerian cases accounted for 77% of polio cases in the world so far this year. The Nigerian state of Kano suspended immunisation in September 2003 due to Muslim leaders' belief that Western vaccines spread AIDS and cause infertility. In May Kano agreed to resume vaccination using vaccine from Indonesia. However by July vaccination had still not recommenced as Muslim clerics considered more tests were necessary. WHO is fearful that the coming rainy season will provide ideal conditions for the spread of the virus and is attempting to create a firewall around Nigeria through vaccination of children in the surrounding countries.

Statues with disabilities

The winning entry in a recent British sculpture exhibition will be placed in Trafalgar Square for 18 months. The statue is of a naked pregnant woman, Alison Lapper, who has no arms and short legs due to phocomelia, a congenital disorder. The Disability rights Commission has congratulated the artist, Marc Quinn for realising that disabled bodies have a power and beauty rarely recognised in an age when youth and 'perfection' are idolised. Quinn says: *At first glance it would seem as if there are few if any sculptures of people with disabilities. However a closer look reveals that Trafalgar Square is one of the few public places where one exists. Nelson, at the top of his column has lost an arm. Alison says that Venus de Milo is admired as one of the great classical beauties, despite having lost her arms.* (From the *Guardian* 16/3/04)

This issue of Polio Particles was first published in Post-Polio Network (NSW) Network News Issue 65, October 2004. Reprint requests should be forwarded to Mary by email at AskMary@post-polionetwork.org.au