



Sabin Oral Sundays

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



By Otto Neubuerger, MD

POLIOMYELITIS OR INFANTILE PARALYSIS had long been a "dread" disease, greatly feared because it often affected young children. Public awareness was raised by the election in 1932 of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had had polio and was associated with treatment programs and the "March of Dimes." There was great satisfaction with the remarkable drop in new cases of polio following more stringent Public Health measures and widespread use of

Salk inactivated virus vaccine.

In the late 1950s, the Sabin live virus oral vaccine underwent clinical trials and came into general use. It was thought superior to the inactivated virus vaccine because it eliminated the carrier shots, and was thought to confer lasting immunity without boosters, and because all children detest injections.

In many areas of the country efforts were made to vaccinate large segments of the population at once in an attempt to rid the world of a scourge (as later actually happened with smallpox). The Medical Society assumed leadership for our community and under a hard-working committee headed by Lewis Lambert, MD, Sabin Oral Sundays became a reality.

There were 113 vaccination centers established, mostly in schools, for Type I on September 27, 1962, Type II on November 4, 1962, and Type III on December 16, 1962, with 12 make-up clinics at later dates. Nearly 400,000 persons received all three vaccinations. Well over 100 physicians of the Society volunteered, as did many nurses, pharmacists, Boy Scouts, and the general public. Milkmen volunteered their refrigerated trucks to deliver the frozen vaccine. It is estimated that 5,000 volunteers altogether made the program work.

Vaccine recipients were asked for a 25¢ donation, but no one was turned away. The vaccine was purchased but all other supplies and labor were donated.

The program actually made a profit, which was used to establish the Medical Society's William E. Dochterman Medical Student Scholarship Fund. Of the population, 82 percent received Type I, 82 percent Type II, and 68 percent Type III (the last type had received adverse publicity).

All in all, it was a very successful enterprise which garnered extensive community support and was seen as altruistic effort on the part of the medical profession.

NOTE: A functional iron lung - the breathing assist device used to treat many polio victims - is on display at the Sierra Sacramento Valley Museum of Medical History. The last company to maintain iron lungs recently went out of business.

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

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