

VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION PHYSICIAN, EDWARD D. FREIS, M.D., RECEIVES LASKER MEDICAL AWARD FOR HYPERTENSION CLINICAL RESEARCH

HON. OLIN E. TEAGUE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 17, 1971

Mr. TEAGUE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, throughout the extensive VA hospital system there are currently about 5,000 ongoing medical research projects to help broaden man's knowledge to help save and prolong the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Mr. Speaker, in New York on Thursday, November 11, 1971, an outstanding physician, Dr. Edward D. Freis of the Veterans' Administration's Department of Medicine and Surgery, who is currently on the staff of the Washington, D.C. Veterans' Administration Hospital, received national recognition for achievements in medical research. At that time, before an assembled group of many of the leaders in American medicine and health care, Dr. Freis presented the Clinical Research Award of the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation for his work in demonstrating the lifesaving effectiveness of diagnosis and treatment of one of the most common forms of heart disease.

It is of interest to note that this highly coveted award to biomedical researchers was established in 1946, and that 22 winners of this award have subsequently received Nobel Prizes for their work.

The basis for the award to Dr. Freis, and the method in which the research was planned and carried out is an outstanding example of the capacity of the health care system of the Veterans' Administration to do what no other single health care system or institution in America can do. By utilizing the staff and facilities of its 166 hospitals, 202 clinics, and 73 nursing homes, that system has the unique capacity for cooperative research. Through this system, studies of the efficacy of the clinical use of various professional techniques and/or therapeutic drugs can be carried out in the shortest possible time with a maximum of accuracy, a minimum of expense, and be more available for immediate use. As a result, this knowledge can not only be applied to the life-saving care and treatment of veterans, but can subsequently be made available to all people through the scientific community of this country and the world.

The following wording of the Citation

awarded to Dr. Freis details his outstanding achievement:

CLINICAL RESEARCH AWARD PRESENTED TO EDWARD D. FREIS, M.D. SENIOR MEDICAL INVESTIGATOR, VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Dr. Freis has demonstrated the life-saving effectiveness of the use of drugs in the treatment of moderate hypertension, and the dramatic reduction of deaths from stroke and congestive heart failure, which can be realized when blood pressure is kept within normal limits.

Hypertension—or high blood pressure—is a leading cause of stroke. Stroke, in turn, kills over 200,000 Americans a year, and is the third leading cause of death in our country.

Hypertension affects almost 23 million Americans, and is a major public health problem.

Dr. Freis has been working on hypertension for over 25 years. His recent contribution has been the definitive study and demonstration of the fact that even moderate hypertension is dangerous, and should, and can be treated successfully.

In 1964, Dr. Freis, with his colleagues in the Veterans Administration, set up the V.A. Cooperative Study Group on Antihypertensive Agents, for moderate hypertension. The results of this five-year, 17-hospital study, established two major points:

1—That drug treatment for moderate hypertension reduced the death rate by more than 50%.

2—That drug treatment is 67% effective in preventing major complications which arise from cases of even moderately high blood pressure. These complications include, among others, strokes, congestive heart failure, and kidney failure.

Dr. Freis' study offers a momentous opportunity to clinical medicine.

It is an exemplary demonstration of the potential of preventive medicine for saving and prolonging the lives of tens of thousands of Americans. The results of this work justify his belief that with continued and intensive efforts, we can control all of the major cardiovascular diseases—the number one killer of our people.

For Dr. Freis' dedication and persistent leadership toward this goal, this 1971 Albert Lasker Clinical Medical Research Award is given.

It should also be noted with great interest by those concerned with the question of bridging the gap of scientific knowledge between the laboratory and the bedside, that Dr. Freis, in his acceptance speech, in the great tradition of American medicine, called for a major effort in this area. He stated:

Thank you on behalf of myself and all of those who have made this advance against hypertension possible. Amazingly the conquest of this most common of diseases has received little public attention. Yet, if we apply the knowledge we already have we can control moderate hypertension now.

There are literally millions of Americans who do not even know that they have high blood pressure. There is, therefore, the need to develop adequate mass screening for the detection of hypertension as well as more effective programs in public education.

How may these goals be achieved? Firstly, by a greater effort on the part of national and local governments to provide facilities and personnel for the detection and treatment of hypertension in the general population. Secondly, the news media, such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines should publicize effectively the simple truth that hypertension now is a controllable disease. This is a real challenge for creative journalism. Thirdly, volunteer health agencies should actively lead and guide this effort.

The problem is one of public education and it is too big to be left entirely to the practicing physician.

There is still another problem which requires public attention. Although the drugs we have today are good they are not ideal. None is effective in all patients and none is entirely free of side effects. However, no new anti-hypertensive drugs have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the past 10 years. This is in striking contrast to the situation in Europe where several new drugs have been introduced recently and are being used with benefit by European physicians. Because the American pharmaceutical companies are finding that drug research in hypertension is a frustrating and unprofitable enterprise, their great talents and know-how are in large measure being directed into other channels. Informed public opinion is needed to restore a climate in the FDA where new drug research in hypertension will be encouraged rather than discouraged.

Recent surveys have shown that only 20% of the patients with persistent hypertension in the United States are receiving effective treatment. This fact points up the real need for mass screening and detection of hypertension in its early stages; for intensive public education; for provision of adequate treatment facilities; and finally, for a concerted research effort to develop even more safe and effective drugs than are available today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to publicly congratulate Dr. Freis and the Veterans' Administration on this outstanding achievement, and I hope that it will be possible to expand these research programs in the future so that this great work can be accelerated.