

# Venom treatment possible for arthritis

United Press International  
ATLANTA, Ga. — The government is considering a request to test for the first time a controversial snake venom treatment for two incurable diseases — arthritis and multiple sclerosis.

Dr. Frederic C. McDuffie, senior vice president for medical affairs for the Arthritis Foundation, said a qualified physician has been identified to perform the tests on a group of patients with rheumatoid arthritis "if

funds for necessary laboratory tests are provided and drug approval comes through."

McDuffie also said medical authorities from the Food and Drug Administration, the Arthritis Foundation and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society plan to meet soon to work out details for the testing.

The snake venom treatments, which use venom from two poisonous Asian snakes — the cobra and the krait — are available only in Flor-

ida because of restrictions imposed by the FDA.

The foundation said controlled scientific trials have not been conducted on the treatments. Patient testimonials, however, have gained extensive publicity.

One out of every seven Americans has arthritis and the foundation says a million new victims are added each year. Sufferers of these crippling ailments include 250,000 children.

McDuffie's comments were car-

ried in the inaugural issue of the foundation's new quarterly newspaper, "The National Arthritis News."

The publication said the venom treatments for arthritis and multiple sclerosis were provided by two physicians, Dr. Ben J. Shepard, 77, a general practitioner who operates a clinic in Miami, and Dr. Murray Sanders of Boca Raton, Fla.

The venom is supplied by William Haast, whose Serpentarium is a

Miami tourist attraction.

According to the foundation newspaper, both doctors were offering varieties of the cobra venom treatment to sufferers of arthritis, multiple sclerosis and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

Haast and Sheppard applied in August 1979 for approval of the venom treatments as an "investigational new drug." Hearings on the application were held in Washington

in November and the FDA is now considering authorizing tests of the drug.

The foundation publication said the venom treatments may not be completely harmless.

"Doctors Sheppard and Sanders have not performed scientifically valid tests to prove their effectiveness, and manufacturing methods used to produce the venom, according to inspection reports issued by

the FDA, are questionable."

The dramatic improvement by some recipients of the venom, not be an improvement at all, the foundation, but rather a remission of the disease.

Foundation spokesmen, however, medical authorities state to discount the possibility cobra venom may provide a remedy for some forms of the crippling diseases.

## Man indicted for sex abuse

United Press International  
HOUSTON — A former children's home manager, against whom homosexual child abuse charges were dropped two weeks ago, has been indicted on new charges of compelling child prostitution.

Robert Cuellar, former supervisor of the Harris County Burnett-Bayland Home for Children, was indicted on the new charges last week but the indictments were withheld until Monday.

Prosecutor Chuck Rosenthal said the first charges — 14 counts of sexual activity with boys aged 14 to 16 — were dropped because of weaknesses in stories told by teen-age complainants and, in one instance, because a boy disappeared.

Rosenthal said the two new child prostitution charges arose from some of the same alleged incidents.

## Parents to get \$ settlement in son's death

United Press International  
AUSTIN — The Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation will pay \$75,000 to the family of an autistic youth who died at Austin State Hospital, lawyers familiar with the case said.

The MHMR Department also has agreed to revise its rules for the treatment of autistic patients, said Mack Kidd, attorney for the family of Michael Shipley, 16. Shipley died at the state hospital in July while receiving heavy doses of tranquilizers.

Shipley had been in the state hospital since November, 1976. An autopsy determined he died from swallowing his own vomit and from heart failure.

An investigation determined the boy also received insufficient attention by medical personnel, that he was given Thorazine in amounts above those recommended, and that the department had a general inability to care for autistic patients.

Attorney General Mark White declined to confirm the cash settlement reportedly agreed to by the state and attorneys for the Shipley family.

"There have been some offers made, but no settlement reached," White said. "But I'm not saying that that dollar amount is inaccurate."

One participant in the negotiations said MHMR agreed to the settlement to avoid a court battle.

"I think that the state preferred to pay the money and correct conditions than have us file a major lawsuit protesting treatment throughout the entire system," said Dayle Bebee, executive director of Advocacy Inc., a federally-funded organization campaigning for rights of the handicapped.

The agreed settlement in the case is expected to incorporate many of the recommendations of the MHMR investigation into the boy's death, including increased staff-to-patient ratios and stringent guidelines for the use of drugs.

The proposed agreement will be presented to the MHMR board when it meets Friday.

Energy talks in Kingsville

United Press International  
AUSTIN — Representatives of both government and industry in the United States and Mexico will participate in an International Conference on Energy Thursday and Friday at Texas A&I University in Kingsville.

Dr. Duane M. Leach, president of Texas A&I, told a news conference at the Capitol Tuesday more than 100 Mexican representatives were expected for the two-day seminar to discuss energy problems common to both countries.

Speakers for the conference will include Robert Krueger, ambassador-at-large and U.S. Coordinator for Mexican Affairs; Dr. Charles Ebinger, director of the program on Energy National Security; G. Dan Rambo of the regional Department of Energy office in Dallas, and Federico Price of Monterrey, Mexico.

Texas Railroad Commissioner Mack Wallace also is to speak, along with Carlos Castillo of Pemex, the Mexican national oil company.

The conference is sponsored by Texas A&I, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, and the Texas Good Neighbor Commission.

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