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1 in a series

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by Kevin Thome

Researcher concentrates studies on influenza treatment, prevention

By **RODNEY RATHER**
Reporter

Influenza vaccines exist that can prevent the flu, but most people do not take them, according to John Quarles, assistant professor of medical microbiology and immunology at Texas A&M.

Because the flu is not a life-threatening disease, people do not feel the need to protect themselves from it as they might against polio or diphtheria, Quarles says.

For nearly 10 years, Quarles has been at A&M conducting research on how to prevent or cure viral infections. This usually involves testing vaccines.

"In the vaccine work, we've been involved primarily in testing a new type of influenza vaccine — the nose-drop kind — as compared to the kind you get as a shot in the arm, with the idea that it may be better or more acceptable to some people," Quarles says.

The vaccines are not tested at A&M until they have gone through several years of testing at the National Institutes of Health. These governmental agencies help fund medical research, so the vaccines are considered safe and possibly useful

before Quarles starts testing them on campus. He tries to determine if the vaccines are actually useful.

"Our part of the question is 'Do they work? Do they work in the real world?'" Quarles says.

That question is answered in part by counting the number of A&M students who get the flu each year and having volunteers participate in flu studies.

About 15 to 35 percent of A&M students get the flu each year, although the statistics vary from year to year, Quarles says. As few as 15 to 18 percent of the students may get the flu in one year, while as many as 50 percent may get it in another year. These percentages closely reflect the percentage of people who get the flu in other areas, like Dallas and Houston, he says.

The influenza outbreak at A&M usually starts in mid-January, immediately after Christmas vacation, and lasts until spring break, Quarles says. The outbreak occurs at the beginning of the spring semester because students return to school after interacting with various people around the world, where they may come in contact with various types of diseases.

"Students leave and scatter out all

over the world, so someone is bound to pick something up and bring back," he says.

In the flu vaccine study, the volunteer is given the serum in the usually October because the flu needs about two months to get protection against the virus. The volunteer waits to see if he contracts the disease.

It is almost impossible to be from being exposed to at least one of the two or three major types of influenza, which change constantly from year to year, but common sense is the best preventive measure in combating the flu, other than use of vaccines, Quarles says.

"Try to eat and sleep decently, not let people sneeze on you or you or do things like that if the obviously infected," he says.

"College students are in kind of a special situation. They can't do as much as they should. They don't always eat properly and get a little run-down."

Currently, Quarles is preparing for a study on the treatment of influenza to be conducted in Japan and is not using students in his research.

A&M prof's visit to Sri Lanka fascinating, educational

By **JEAN MANSAVAGE**
Reporter

When Dr. David Reed informed his Horticulture 201 class he would not be teaching the class for a month because he was going to Sri Lanka, his students chuckled. They figured that it was one of Reed's light-hearted gags.

It wasn't. Reed left Oct. 7 for the small island country off the southern coast of India to teach a post-graduate course at the University of Peradeniya. He also evaluated the school's research program and advised one of their graduate students. He returned Oct. 31.

Aside from his university business, Reed says he learned more about tropical horticulture, his specialty, during the visit.

"Since my area of expertise is tropical horticulture, I was able to gain first-hand knowledge of what I'd been preaching," he says. "It was an opening of awareness of my expertise."

Reed says he was fascinated by scenes of local culture such as the fire dancers who perform with torches pierced into their cheeks.

Men chipping away at huge boulders with chisels for days to make gravel and women working in rice patties, cultivating the grain by hand, illustrate the country's heavy reliance upon manual labor, he says.

One slide from the trip shows Reed in casual American dress — Izod shirt, jeans and boat shoes — atop an Asian elephant. This laid-back style is also typical of Reed at Texas A&M.

He enjoys chiding his students about drinking Coke too early in the morning. They should drink coffee to get their caffeine, he says.

Reed's sense of humor comes through even in his class lecture supplement.

His drawing of the nitrogen cycle of soil has a squirrel dying of a heart attack and decomposing to add organic material to the soil.

The women in the class didn't like when it was a hunter that led to the death of the little squirrel, so it is a heart attack that kills him, Reed says.

Reed says students at A&M should experience the Asian culture. "Everybody should go once," he says. "Sri Lanka is good exposure to Asian culture."

Sri Lanka is a poor country with a

low standard of living, but it has famine and its people are highly educated, Reed says. Every person met there could speak Sinhalese and English.

Education is free to those who qualify through the post-graduate level, Reed explains. The number of students who qualify for the high levels is limited due to a selection process of advancement.

Because Reed taught at a high level, he instructed those who were the cream of the cream of the country.

Reed says the problem with a country having well-educated people is that they leave Sri Lanka for better paying jobs in other countries. Reed was displeased with the aspect of Sri Lankan culture.

"The lack of restrooms or other facilities was memorable," he comments. "I guess Americans are just too picky."

The professor says he thinks the experience was very worthwhile. "The trip was the most educational experience of my life," he says.

Doctor defends use of weed killer as diet drug

Associated Press

HOUSTON — A Houston physician who the Texas attorney general's office is suing defended the use of a weed killer in the diet clinics he owns, saying the chemical is effective in helping patients lose weight.

The attorney general's suit con-

tends the chemical 2-4 Dinitrophenol can cause serious side effects — including vomiting, high fever, headaches and abdominal pain, but Dr. Nicholas Bachynsky said "every drug has some side effects."

Bachynsky, who owns Physicians Clinics, said Dinitrophenol is effective in treating 90 percent of the pa-

tients with weight problems. "The question is not that it's poison, but whether it's taken in proper doses," Bachynsky said.

The attorney general's office last week sued Bachynsky, claiming use of the drug, which also is known as Mitcal — in overweight patients is toxic and has no medical value.

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