

Menacing Epidemic—

VD Among Youth

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The nation's menacing epidemic of venereal disease among young people is the target of a spring campaign sponsored by the National Education Association's Department of School Nurses (DSN/NEA).

Plans for Youth Health Defense Days, May 1975, are being coordinated by DSN state chairpersons in 21 states. But the nation's school nurses hope the special drive to detect and begin treatment of gonorrhea and syphilis among high school and college students and other young adults will truly become nationwide.

This event is one of the major efforts of DSN's project, "Operation Uplift: Better Health for Better Learning."

"We call on every community in the nation, working with their school nurses, to pool their resources to combat these widespread diseases and to set up clinical programs to prevent recurrence," said Sally R. Williams, R.N., Garden Grove, Calif., chairperson of the project ad hoc committee. "Otherwise, this national epidemic can become a national tragedy."

Katherine Schlup, project director and administrative director of DSN, Washington, D.C., noted that statistics provide a grim picture of the venereal disease epidemic.

"More than 800,000 cases of gonorrhea alone were reported in the year ending June 30, 1973," she said.

"This figure, which included an increase of 90,000 cases over the previous year, represented the highest incidence since the U.S. Public Health Service started keeping records in 1919. PHS, pointing out that many cases are unreported, estimated there were at least 2.5 million new cases of gonorrhea in the nation during that 1972-73 twelve-month period."

Since teen-agers and young people in their early 20's are particularly susceptible to venereal disease, DSN headquarters staff and state leaders are seeking a variety of channels to convey the message to this age group: If you suspect you have been exposed to venereal disease, do yourself a favor and seek help during Youth Health Defense Days (or before).

The high interest in combatting VD, Mrs. Schlup noted, is indicated by the phenomenal response to a single East Coast television announcement last year concerning a VD Hotline, "Operation Venus." The resulting 100,000 calls virtually swamped telephone circuits over a wide area.

The DSN director pointed out that the school nurses are soliciting the help of other organizations and groups in making the youth days successful. Among these are the Student National Education Association, Junior Chamber of Commerce, clinics, and medical and religious groups.

Another concern of the school nurses is the high rate of drug abuse by the nation's youth. Mrs. Schlup said a survey indicates that 6% of high school students, or more than a million, have used the deadly drug heroin.

Eight per cent of high school youth—over one and one-half million—have tried hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, mescaline, and peyote, while some of these youths and hundreds of thousands more have experimented with a variety of other drugs.

School nurses are increasingly concerned about one drug whose danger is commonly disguised by

its wide social acceptance: alcohol. Among the 100,000 drinkers who become alcoholics each year are not only a growing number of women but also a shockingly greater number of young people.

DSN's attack on drug abuse is focused mainly on implementing the recommendations of a recent NEA Task Force on Drug Education. One recommendation is the standardization of drug laws across the nation, and the nurses are working with NEA's Government Relations office to bring that about.

The five-year-old Department of School Nurses has established data banks on drug education programs that are in operation, available instructional materials and aids, institutions providing rehabilitation for addicted teen-age drug abusers, and drug agencies and consultants available to work with teacher associations in providing in-service programs on drug education.

Five regional conferences were held last year—in Des Moines, Los Angeles, Tulsa, Philadelphia, and Boston—to train leaders for work in both drug education and VD education and control.

Besides the 400 school nurses who attended were many parents, students, clergymen, and representatives of federal, state, and local agencies as well as church and civic groups.