

Hibernation Could Lengthen Human Life


SAN DIEGO -- If people could hibernate at night instead of merely sleeping they might lengthen their lives by 15 per cent, says a British biologist. Unluckily, man isn't one of the hibernating mammals, said Dr. Alex Comfort, of University College, London. But he added that there are other more feasible ways of slowing metabolism and thus perhaps slowing the inexorable process of growing old and senile. Hibernation's advantage over sleep, insofar as slowing metabolism is concerned, lies in its greater lowering of body temperature, Dr. Comfort said. The same thing might be accomplished by artificial cooling at regular intervals. Dr. Comfort said eating less might do the same thing, and he cited some experiments with laboratory animals that indicate this is so. Animals that were given all they could eat of good, nutritious food lived shorter lives than others of the same species, that were starved every third day. More startling still, the well-fed animals developed more malignant tumors than the ones that were intermittently starved. DR. COMFORT a speaker at Tuesday's session of an American Cancer Society seminar, said malignancy and aging may, in fact, be caused by the same thing--the loss of body cells of their ability to use the genetic information stored in their nuclei. It is this material in genes, present in every cell, that causes them to differentiate and replicate, that is, causes some cells to grow into finger-nails, for example, rather than



CYCLONE VICTIM -- "The Wizard of Oz" was favorite theater fare throughout Farmington Schools during May. At Wooddale, Barbara Wetterhold as Dorothy invites Ricky Giles, the tin Woodsman, to help her find the wizard. The Wooddale production was staged by fourth graders.

into skin, or teeth, or bone or heart muscle. In the case of aging, loss of this ability is a gradual one, a progressive "switching off" of the genetic information. In the case of malignancy, however, the loss is abrupt. Dr. Comfort said cancer cells may be "subversive," that is, they are bent on preserving themselves and escaping the general debilitation of the aging body. HE THINKS a great deal may be learned about cancer by learning more about growing old, and urged governments and private foundations to step up research in aging. "If there were enough support forthcoming for such research, both in time and money, a real understanding could be achieved in from five to 10 years," Dr. Comfort said. "If this happens there will also be a good chance of our learning how to interfere with the natural aging process," he said. He doesn't think such understanding will result in a dramatic lengthening of the average life. It will be too gradual for "We may be able, eventually, to move everybody up a decade or so, so that the 50-year-old man of the future will be like the 40-year-old man today, and the man of 90 like today's man of 80," Dr. Comfort said.

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