

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE JOHN E. FOGARTY, U. S. REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
SECOND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF R. I. IN SUPPORT OF HIS JOINT RESOLU-  
TION DESIGNATING MONTH AUGUST 15 THRU SEPTEMBER 15 NATIONAL ALLERGY MONTH

The Problem of the Allergic Diseases

Allergies afflict an estimated 17 million persons in the United States. Some idea of what a staggering burden this represents can be gained if we remember that this figure approximates the combined populations of our four largest cities: New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. Stated another way, the number of people in this country who suffer from some form of allergy is equal to the total population of the following states: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Thus we see why allergies rank third in prevalence among the chronic diseases, outnumbered only by cardiovascular disease and the arthritic disorders.

The burden which the allergic diseases place on our people is heavy indeed. These disorders include such conditions as asthma, hay fever, eczema, allergic headache, abnormal reactions to drugs, and many others. In addition, allergic factors are increasingly under suspicion in connection with chronic conditions such as heart ailments, hearing loss, ulcerative colitis, kidney disorders, and connective tissue diseases. Allergies also complicate many parasitic infestations.

One of the most striking characteristics of human allergy is the diversity of its causes. They include, for example, inhaled materials such as plant pollens and molds; ingested substances such as food and drugs; injected materials such as antitoxins made from

animal serum; and contact substances ranging from metals and plastics to dyes and a wide variety of chemicals.

Industrial progress has intensified the problem of allergy. There is widespread evidence of sensitization to industrial chemical agents, including the constantly increasing number of new compounds used in our modern technology.

Investigators who are studying these problems state that allergic contact skin disease is one of the more common diseases in industry today. It is frequently seen, for example, among workers who handle dyes and dye intermediates, photographic developers, rubber accelerators and anti-oxidants, soaps, mercury solutions, plants and plant derivatives, insecticides, plastics, and antibiotics.

Many allergy sufferers periodically lose time from work, reducing our industrial productivity, and some become permanently disabled. A survey of this problem in the soap industry was recently completed by the Association of American Soap and Glycerine Producers. The study, covering 141 plants employing 429,000 persons, showed that 26 percent of the employees were exposed to potential skin irritants every day. Of this 26 percent, at least one-third picked up some form of skin disease; many of these were of allergic origin.

About three million persons in the United States suffer from asthma, which ranks as the most serious and important of the allergic disorders. This disease is characterized by attacks of choking, shortness of breath, coughing, and wheezing. In some it occurs only at certain seasons of the year, in others at fairly long intervals,

while in many it is a daily problem. Many of these cases are in young children. The extent of the asthma problem is not fully appreciated. Few people realize, for example, that crippling lung conditions due to asthma are many times more common than crippling from poliomyelitis.

The most prevalent allergic disease is hay fever, a nasal allergy produced by seasonal substances such as pollen and molds. Hay fever can also be produced the year around by materials such as house dust and animal dandruff. Untreated, the condition often develops into asthma.

The economic cost from loss of work by the affected individual is enormous. It has been estimated that about one-third of hay fever victims are bread winners and that the average loss from work is about seven days. This gives us a figure of 16 million man-days lost. Stated another way, it would take over 40,000 people working for an entire year to make up the work left undone by hay fever sufferers.

The antibiotics and new drugs so essential to modern medical practice have likewise introduced additional problems of drug hypersensitivity. Those who have studied reactions following antibiotic administration are convinced that the number and severity of such reactions have been on the increase for several years.

An editorial in a recent issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association stated that about two and a half million pounds of antibiotics were produced in the United States in 1956. Of the

17 different antibiotics available to physicians, penicillin accounted for 25 percent of the total produced.

The Journal states that a study was recently made of case histories of drug reactions reported as severe by the physician or hospital involved. The results showed that penicillin was involved in 80 percent (2,517 out of 2,995 cases) of all reactions reviewed.

"The great majority of severe penicillin reactions," reports the Journal, "were of the anaphylactoid shock type, with a fatality rate of 9 percent. No deaths occurred in the cases of anaphylactoid reaction involving orally administered penicillin, while there were 63 deaths following intramuscular injection of this drug in 611 cases. Sixteen anaphylactoid reactions with two deaths were associated with other antibiotics. The incidence of anaphylactoid reactions increased during the three years covered by this survey: 179 cases in 1954, 231 in 1955, and 301 in 1956."

No one would question the fact that penicillin has saved many thousands of lives in the past decade, and this reduction in mortality and in complications of disease have affected the lives of millions. Nevertheless, the allergic problems posed by these widely used therapeutic agents are serious and deserve extensive study.

Many other examples might be cited of the growing importance of allergy as a major health problem. In this area, needs are varied and pressing. Most medical schools, for example, still present inadequate teaching in allergy to medical students. And many physicians could benefit from specialized training in this field. Still others should be encouraged to seek careers in allergy research.

What is being done to help the millions of Americans suffering from allergic diseases? To begin with, a new voluntary organization, the Allergy Foundation of America, has been established under the sponsorship of the two national professional societies, the American Academy of Allergy and the American College of Allergists. This agency was formed five years ago and has done much to bring to the American people a deeper awareness of allergy as a major health problem.

The Allergy Foundation has initiated a program of student scholarships, established fellowships for training specialists and investigators, and has published a number of pamphlets on various aspects of allergic disease. This program is complemented by the additional support which the Federal Government is now supplying through an expanded program of research and training supported by the National Institutes of Health, research arm of the Public Health Service, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

This year the Allergy Foundation of America plans to sponsor National Allergy Month, August 15-September 15. The purpose of this observance is to disseminate as widely as possible information concerning allergy as a growing health problem and how it can be combatted through support of basic research and the development of better methods of treatment and control. To this end the Foundation will seek to obtain a Presidential proclamation urging Americans to back this program through voluntary gifts and service in their communities.