

An unparalyzed Pacifica child is unsuffering today

You didn't see a headline in last week's Tribune about a polio epidemic in Pacifica. If you are under 30, you almost certainly have never seen a news story about a hometown polio epidemic. You may not even fully realize what polio is. That's because a couple of scientists, Salk and Sabin, found two different vaccines, and all of a sudden, on the time scale of half my lifetime, polio was gone.

Just imagine that 20 or 25 Pacifica children suddenly came down with a disease that paralyzed them, and left them that way for life. Some would be in Iron Lungs, unable to breathe without machinery. Some would be on crutches. Some would be in wheelchairs. A few would die. This is the Pacifica story that didn't happen. There are no polio victims in Cabrillo School, or Fairmont

School, or Linda Mar School, or Pacific Heights, or Westview. Notices are not being sent home by tense, worried principals and teachers alerting parents to the danger. Teachers are not hearing from worried parents when their child has what appears to be a serious, extended cold.

If you are my age, or a little younger, at least one of your neighbors got polio when you were growing up. If you were particularly unlucky, it was you. Some adults got it as well. Franklin Roosevelt was one of them. He was the poster boy for the March of Dimes, headed by his former law partner.

Money was short in those depression days. The dime you gave to the March of Dimes could buy you an ice cream cone, two scoops, high quality stuff, too. Or it could buy your family a pound and a half of corned beef. With some cabbage and potatoes, you had a St. Patrick's day feast. But you knew it was important to fight polio, so you sacrificed. Funny thing. It took years, but it worked. Before it worked, though, in one family I know, the children were devastated by polio. All three boys got it. All three still suffer, in varying degrees, today. Polio can come back to haunt the victims, even those who thought they had beat it. It recurs in later life, as it has done to one of my aunts.

Today, in the third world, children still get polio. But Rotary Clubs and other groups are spreading the vaccines around, trying to eradicate polio by the year 2005. We got rid of

The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



Smallpox. We can do it for polio as well. Funny thing. A dose of the vaccine costs about the same today as that depression era ice cream cone. A dime. Today it's about the best bargain around. For the price of 30 to 60 minutes parking in San Francisco, two and a half kids can be protected from polio. For two days' parking fees at the airport, one child can be saved from polio. For less than

month's parking in some places, a life can be saved. What a bargain!

It is ironic that the odds of winning the lottery today are much worse than the odds of getting polio in 1939. Can you imagine getting a polio ticket, and "winning?" What a terrible prize!

Paul Azevedo has been writing "The Reactor" in the Pacifica Tribune for more than two decades.

Talk, depression screening scheduled at Mills-Peninsula

Everyone has emotional ups and downs, but a persistent bout of depression is a serious illness that can be treated, says Daniel Becker, MD, the psychiatrist who is medical director of Mills-Peninsula's mental health programs.

This month, there will be two opportunities to explore the symptoms and treatments for clinical depression. Dr. Becker will speak on depression Wednesday, Oct. 8, from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. in Hendrickson Auditorium at the Health Center. The talk is part of the Physicians Lecture Series. Admission is \$1. The Wellness Center will offer its annual free Depression Screening Thursday, Oct. 9, from 6 to 8 p.m., also in Hendrickson Auditorium. The evening will include an introductory talk on depression, a video, a written screening and an opportunity to speak with a health professional.

Registration is required. Call 650-696-5600.

If you or someone you know has been sad or irritable and has had at least five or more of the following symptoms for more than two weeks, contact a health professional as soon as possible.

- Clinical depression can be treated successfully with medication and therapy.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless

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