

# SHORT TO MODERATE PERIODS OF POVERTY MOST LIKELY TO CAUSE LACK OF HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE, CENSUS BUREAU REPORTS

A new report, Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Health Insurance, 1990 to 1992 (P70-37), released recently by the Commerce Department's Census Bureau shows that people moving in and out of poverty are most likely to suffer periods without health insurance.

Bob Bennefield, author of the report, says, "Persons living above the poverty line for the entire 32 months of the survey had only about a 1-in-10 (13 percent) chance of being without health insurance for a month or more. People in poverty for the full 32 months had a 3-in-10 (31 percent) chance of being without health insurance. But if you were in poverty for one to six months during the 32-month period, you had a nearly 5-in-10 chance (48 percent) chance of being without health insurance for at least one month. And if you were in poverty for between a year and two years you had nearly a 7-in-10 (68

percent) chance of lacking coverage."

When asked to explain the disparity in coverage between those above poverty plus those in continual poverty and those who may be moving in and out of poverty, Bennefield said, "Medicaid and private health insurance seem to be taking care of most of the needs of those in continual poverty and those above poverty, respectively. However, people at the margin, particularly those who become poor, are more likely to have lost their private health insurance but may not be yet qualified or ready to apply for government assistance."

Other information in the report includes:

- Between 1990 and 1992, 60 million Americans lacked health insurance for at least one month.
- Women are more likely than men to have continuous health

coverage (76 versus 73 percent). This is because women are more likely to live in poverty and thus receive medical assistance from the government. Also, more women than men are 65 and over, thus being covered by Medicare.

• Persons of Hispanic origin are over twice as likely to lack health insurance for a month as Whites, not of Hispanic origin, (48 to 21 percent). African Americans are also more likely than Whites, not of Hispanic origin, to lack health insurance for a month (36 to 21 percent).

• People living in central cities or rural areas are more likely to experience one or more months without health insurance than those who live in the suburbs (28 to 22 percent).

• Nearly one-third of people (32 percent) living in the South experienced one or more months without health insurance. This compares to 27 percent in the West, 21 percent in the Midwest, and 18 percent in the Northeast.

• Eighty-eight percent of full-time workers have continuous health coverage with 67 percent (See *SHORT*, Page 21)

# HEALTH

## HEALTHBRIEFS

### SMART PROGRAM OFFERS JOBS & EDUCATION'

College undergraduates interested in biomedical careers can experience scientific research as a summer job.

The Graduate School of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston sponsors the 10-week Summer Medical and Research Training (SMART) Program. Undergraduates from throughout the U.S. get first-hand experience in laboratory settings. Participants also attend daily research seminars and other educational activities.

Acceptance is highly competitive. More than 700 applicants typically vie for 100 positions. Inquiries should be directed to: Dr. Gayle R. Slaughter, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Baylor College of Medicine, One Baylor Plaza, Houston, Texas 77030. The telephone number is (713) 798-5919. The deadline is February 1, 1995.

★★★★ SCIENTISTS MAKE

### DISCOVERY ABOUT DISEASE

Researchers have taken the first step in identifying a gene that causes Bardet-Biedle syndrome, a rare disease causing mental retardation and physical deformities.

Scientists at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and the University of Utah Medical Center have identified the location of the chromosome (11q) where the gene is believed to exist.

"Since no two cases of this disease are exactly alike," said Dr. Richard A. Lewis of Baylor, "this initial discovery is crucial to finding the location of the gene itself, which will be important for future diagnosis as well as identifying families at risk for having children with the disorder."

Features of Bardet-Biedle syndrome include retinitis pigmentosa, extra fingers or toes, mental retardation, obesity, underdeveloped male genitalia and delayed female puberty.

### ★★★★ HAVE A COLD? WASH YOUR HANDS

HOUSTON—If you catch a cold, remember to wash your hands a lot to lessen the chance of sharing it with others.

Although most colds are contracted by breathing virus-filled droplets, many colds result from rubbing the eyes or nose with fingers that have picked up a virus from hand-to-hand contact, said Dr. Jane Corboy of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "When people with colds cough or sneeze into the hands and then touch objects at home, work or school," Corboy said, "they leave colds-causing viruses behind."

In addition to frequent hand-washing, tissues and handkerchiefs can lessen or even prevent the passing of colds to others.

★★★★ COLD CAN BE HARMFUL EVEN DOWN SOUTH HOUSTON—If you live in the (See *Healthbriefs*, Page 21)

# DEPRESSION



My roommate was depressed. More than the blues. I mean seriously depressed. She always looked sad. Cried a lot. She couldn't sleep, eat, or do any of her work.

## Treat it! Defeat it!

Most of the time she wouldn't talk to me. I just couldn't reach her.

I figured she needed to get professional help, before her pain got worse. So I checked it out.

I was amazed. Once her depression was diagnosed, treatment was effective and began to work within a few weeks.

Got a friend or loved one who you think is depressed? For free materials, call 1-800-421-4211.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES National Institutes of Health. National Institute of Mental Health.



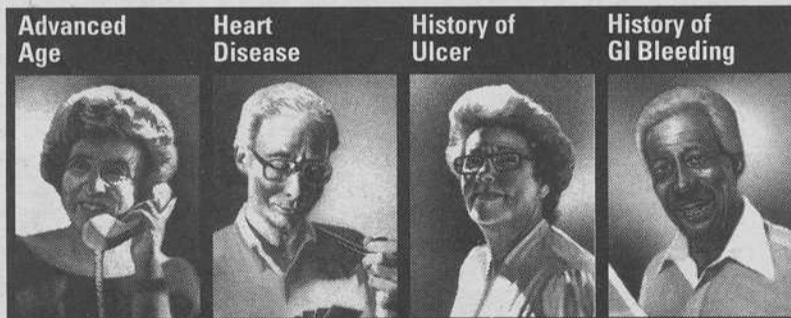
## spotlight on health

### Common Arthritis Medications May Require An "Ounce Of Prevention"

(NAPS)—Thirty million people worldwide—including 14 million in the United States—depend on medications called "non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs" to relieve their aches and pains, primarily due to arthritis. And all evidence shows that for many users, these drugs—including aspirin, ibuprofen, oxaprozin and other such medications—are an effective way to maintain their productivity and quality of life, despite their ailment.

But use of NSAIDs can also have a price: It's estimated that, overall, a quarter of regular NSAID users will develop ulcers or other gastrointestinal complications—some of which are life-threatening. In a study published August 15 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, it was found that NSAID users are at higher risk if they are older, have heart disease, or have a history of ulcers or gastrointestinal bleeding.

"NSAIDs are important, needed drugs; for many people, they provide much-needed relief from pain and inflammation," says Fred Silverstein, MD, the gastroenterologist who served as the lead author of the research report. "But for approximately one to two percent (which translates into 140,000 to 280,000 individuals in the United States alone), they can cause life-threatening GI side-effects. This study demonstrated that use of a drug called misoprostol significantly reduces the occurrence of such serious complications."



Anyone can be at risk of developing NSAID-induced gastrointestinal damage. But certain factors can significantly increase this risk.

NSAIDs work by depleting hormone-like substances in the body—called prostaglandins—that can be both beneficial and harmful. Although prostaglandins cause pain and inflammation in the joints and other areas of the body, they also help protect the gastrointestinal tract. Misoprostol (brand name Cytotec®) is a synthetic prostaglandin that replenishes this substance in the stomach. In the study published in the *Annals*, 8,843 NSAID users—of which about half were also taking misoprostol—were followed for six months. The use of misoprostol reduced the occurrence of serious GI complications by 40 percent.

Like other medications, misoprostol can cause some side-effects of its own—of which the most common are diarrhea and abdominal pain. However, these symptoms are rarely severe and are usually transient, lasting a few days at the beginning of therapy. In addition, Cytotec

should not be taken by women who are or may become pregnant.

Regular NSAID users, say physicians, should be on the watch for common GI side-effects of NSAIDs, such as indigestion, nausea and abdominal cramps. If they occur, they should be reported to a doctor. However, previous research has shown that up to 58 percent of serious, NSAID-induced GI complications occur without warning signs.

"The basic take-home message from this new research is that NSAIDs can exact a price, particularly from some types of patients," says Dr. David Graham, chief of gastroenterology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and another author of the research report. "But that doesn't mean these individuals must give up their medication and its benefits. There are preventive steps that can be taken, and NSAID users should discuss with their doctors whether this option makes sense for them."