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A1

HUMAN GUINEA PIGS

Syphilis Patients Died Untreated

By JEAN HELLER
Associated Press

For 40 years the U.S. Public Health Service has conducted a study in which human guinea pigs, not given proper medical treatment, have died of syphilis and its side effects.

The study was conducted to determine from autopsies what the disease does to the human body.

PHS officials responsible for initiating the experiment have long since retired. Current PHS officials, who say they have serious doubts about the morality of the study, also say

it now is too late to treat syphilis in any of the study's surviving volunteers.

But PHS doctors say they are rendering whatever other medical services they can give to the survivors while the study of the disease's effects continues.

The experiment, called the Tuskegee Study, began in 1932 with about 600 black men, mostly poor and uneducated, from Tuskegee, Ala., an area which had the highest syphilis rate in the nation at the time.

One-third of the group was free of syphilis; two-thirds showed evidence of the disease. In the syphilitic group, half were given the best treatment known at the time, but the other half, about 200 men, received no treatment at all for syphilis, PHS officials say.

As incentives to enter the program, the men were promised free transportation to and from hospitals, free hot lunches, free medicine for any diseases other than syphilis and free burial after autopsies were performed.

The Tuskegee Study began 10 years before penicillin was discovered to be a cure for syphilis and 15 years before the drug became widely available. Yet even after penicillin became common, and while its use probably could have helped or saved a number of the experiment subjects, the drug was not given to them, according to Dr. J. D. Millar.

He is chief of the venereal disease branch of the PHS.

See SYPHILIS, Page A-7

'The American people are sorry'

Survivors of syphilis experiments graciously accept nation's apology

By Stewart M. Powell

Herald Newspapers

WASHINGTON — President Clinton apologized on behalf of the nation Friday to survivors of the "Tuskegee experiment" in which 399 black men from rural Alabama were deliberately denied medical treatment for syphilis during a secret 40-year federal study assessing the effects of the gruesome disease.

Herman Shaw, a survivor representing the last eight living participants, gracefully accepted the nation's apology at a White House ceremony in the East Room.

"We are delighted to come here today to close this very tragic and painful chapter in our lives," said Shaw, 94, who worked for 44 years at Tallassee Mill in Tallassee, Ala.

"We were treated unfairly — to some extent like guinea pigs," Shaw said. "We were not pigs. We were not dancing boys. We were all hard-working men, not boys, and citizens of the United States."

Shaw added: "In my opinion, it is never too late to restore faith and trust."

Clinton, who embraced Shaw, spoke slowly, with emotion in his voice.

"We can look at you in the eye and finally say on behalf of the American people, what the United States government did was shameful, and I am sorry," Clinton declared.

"The American people are sorry — for the loss, for the years of hurt," Clinton added. "You did nothing wrong, but you were grievously wronged. I apologize and I am sorry that this apology has been so long in coming."

The controversial research study was conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service from 1932 to 1972, a period that began during the depths of the Great Depression and spanned the administrations of seven presidents.

The U.S. Public Health Service enticed black men, many poor sharecroppers from rural Macon County, Ala., to take part in the secret research study by promising free medical care, free meals and burial insurance.

The 399 patients afflicted with the debilitating disease were never told that they were suffering from infectious syphilis. Doctors told the participants that they were being treated for "bad blood."

Victims were given only vitamins for their illness. Physicians did not even treat their patients with the blend of arsenic and mercury that was commonly used to treat syphilis in the 1930s.

The participants were later denied updated medical treatment after penicillin was discovered in 1941 and determined to cure syphilis in 1947. In addition to the 399 men with syphilis, another 201 Alabamans without syphilis took part in the study to serve as a "control group."

Syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease, can cause brain damage, paralysis and death if left untreated.

By the time the study was unmasked by the Associated Press in 1972, 28 patients had died of syphilis, 100 more had died from related complications and at least 40 wives had been unwittingly infected by their husbands.

Surviving participants settled a class action suit against the federal government in 1974 for \$9 million. The federal government agreed to pay surviving participants with syphilis \$37,500 each. Participants who did not have syphilis were paid \$15,000. Heirs to deceased participants who suffered untreated syphilis were paid \$15,000. The government also agreed to provide ongoing medical care.

Clinton's apology comes amid an ongoing White House campaign to use the bully pulpit of the presidency to help overcome racial divisions that afflict the United States.



KNIGHT-ALLER PHOTO

Herman Shaw, one of the last surviving participants in the secret Tuskegee syphilis study, hugs President Clinton Friday at the White House after Clinton apologized for the federal research that led to nearly 400 black men.