

Abnormal Births Draw Warning On Tranquilizers

Dr. Helen B. Taussig yesterday warned women to avoid using drugs, particularly tranquilizers, during their child-bearing years.

Dr. Taussig, professor of pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and developer of the blue baby operation, recently spent six weeks in

Europe studying the causes of increased abnormal births in West Germany and England.

She said use of a tranquilizer containing a drug called talidomide by women during pregnancy will cause nearly 5,000 such births in West Germany this year.

Reports From Italy

Her warning followed a report from Turin, Italy, that five deformed infants were born there between April 7 and May 16 at a clinic where the previous record had been one such defective birth every two years.

The babies lacked forearms. They were born with tiny stumps where the arms should have been. Two of the five infants also suffered from intestinal occlusion. All bore reddish birthmarks on nose, forehead and upper lip.

Professor Varia Gomirato Sandrucci, director of the University Kulturin's Pediatric Institute, reported the births to the Turin Academy of Medicine.

Made In West Germany

The report stated that two of the mothers said they used a tranquilizer containing talidomide during their pregnancies, one used a tranquilizer whose name she had forgotten and two mothers said they took no tranquilizers.

Dr. Taussig said the Turin situation undoubtedly was caused by the drug.

Circumstantial evidence against it has been steadily accumulating, she said, and most German doctors feel it is responsible for birth abnormalities.

Dr. Taussig said talidomide was first made in West Germany, and rights were sold to England, Portugal and the United States.

The drug was withdrawn from the market in England and West Germany last November.

Seeks Stronger Act

Dr. Taussig said it was never sold in the United States because it caused inflammation of the nerves and the Food and Drug Administration would not approve it.

"Had it been invented here, it probably would have passed," she said.

Dr. Taussig reported she is waging a campaign to strengthen the Food and Drug Act against drugs which can cause "new and unpredicted complications."

One great hazard of women using drugs during their child-bearing years is that they can take a harmful dose without realizing they are pregnant, she said.