

Dr. Taussig Says U.S. Exports Inferior Medicine

By Morton Mintz

Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) said yesterday that he will draft a bill to forbid the export of medicines falling short of American quality control standards.

He announced this after hearing testimony from Dr. Helen B. Taussig that manufacturers in this and other drug-producing countries unload medications which are below strength, stale or otherwise inferior on developing nations ill-equipped to protect themselves.

It was Dr. Taussig who in 1962 alerted the United States to thalidomide—the drug which in other countries caused the birth of thousands of limbless babies.

With the late Dr. Alfred Blalock, she earlier developed the famous "Blue Baby" operation.

Dr. Taussig is professor emeritus of pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University and a former president of the American Heart Association.

In testimony before Nelson's Senate Small Business monopoly subcommittee, she and the Senator also agreed on the need for legislation to require the labels on medicines taken home from the drugstore to identify all active ingredients by generic name and to identify the manufacturer.

Dr. Taussig testified that

such a bill would minimize the possibility of a disaster which could occur as long as a single drug can "masquerade" under hundreds of unrevealing brand names. She said such a drug would be almost impossible to trace or identify if something were found wrong with it after distribution to patients.

IN 1964, President Johnson awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Dr. Taussig. Last May, he made her an alternate delegate to a meeting of the World Health Organization in Geneva.

There, she testified, she learned that quality control of drugs had for years been talked about in WHO, but with meager results.

She indicated that delegates from developing countries said they received stale or inferior medicine from the United States but she said they shied away from naming specific sources of inferior medicine. After the hearing, Nelson said he would ask data from WHO.

Referring particularly to antibiotics which, when stale, "are almost worse than useless," Dr. Taussig told Nelson, "I am ashamed that the United States belongs to the group of nations which may on occasion export out-of-date preparations."

Nelson agreed that for the United States to permit such exports would be "a disgrace." Sen. Mark O. Hatfield (R-Ore.) said such a situation could put us in a "hypocritical posture," that could undo foreign aid programs.

IN RESPONSE to an inquiry, the Agency for International Development said it knew of no basis for a charge by Dr. Taussig that through AID the Government "permits or even pos-

sibly dispenses... any pharmaceutical product to other lands which is not permitted to be sold in this country."

An AID spokesman said that suppliers of tax-financed drugs must certify that less than one-sixth (in some cases, one-third) of the safe-use time period has elapsed as of the day of shipment for export.

Turning to labeling of prescription medicines, Dr. Taussig recalled that when countries around the world recognized the danger of thalidomide it was "masquerading under at least 50 if

not 100 or more, different names."

She warned:

"Clearly the more names the offending agent is distributed under, the more difficult is the problem of detection. Thus it is obvious to everyone that if an epidemic is nationwide or worldwide and the cause... lies in the product which is sold or distributed under 100 different names, the detection and recognition of that product is extremely difficult.

"I shudder to think that if a drug was ever produced

which was a tranquilizer, a good tonic, or a drug claimed to increase virility and it affected the sperm in such a manner as to injure the brain or even the reproductive organs of the fetus, how difficult it would be to trace that drug and how virtually impossible if the drug masqueraded under 500 different names! This is not an impossibility nor in truth is it [more] improbable than landing a man on the moon seemed 30 years ago. Hence, the value of having the generic name on the label seems incontrovertible."