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by

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Dr. Ratner's work in the field of public health in relation to the polio vaccine began in the 1950s when he became known in the United States and abroad for his critique of the manufacturing process of the Salk vaccine. At that time he was Director of Public Health of Oak Park, Illinois and Professor at Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine. He wrote a piece entitled "The Devil's Advocate and the 1955 Salk Poliomyelitis Vaccine Program" which was published in the November 1955 *Bulletin of the American Association of Public Health Physicians*, of which he was then editor. This critique faulted the methodology of the supposedly inactivated Salk vaccine which not only contained live polio virus in 1955, but, as would come to light in the 60s, also contained Simian 40 between 1955 and 1963.

Soon after the publication of Dr. Ratner's critique, one of the drug companies producing the vaccine was instrumental in having the editorship taken away from him. However, he managed to retain the editorship long enough to write the footnotes for one last issue in which he documented questionable procedures in the manufacturing and evaluation process of the Salk vaccine at that time. In Germany, the American drug companies and the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis has less influence: Dr. Ratner's work was independently corroborated by a 1956 study of the West German Health Ministry which reported outbreaks of polio among recently vaccinated children in Germany.

In 1955, when Salk vaccine manufactured by the Cutter Company was being administered in the western states, Dr. Ratner had noticed that there were increases in the number of polio cases outside the seasonal patterns that might normally have been expected. Pre-season polio cases were occurring at the end of winter before the polio season normally began. This led Dr. Ratner to suspect that live virus remained in the vaccine. Staying up during the night to monitor the national news on radio, he found that news of polio cases among children who had been vaccinated in the

western states was being reported on the night news, but was never subsequently reported in the eastern newspapers. The newspapers were suppressing the story. He and several other health officers became increasingly concerned about the problems with the vaccine and tried with limited success to bring the matter to the attention of the medical community.

In the face of intense media promotion of the vaccine, Dr. Ratner, alone among his fellow health officers, refused to dispense free government-distributed Salk vaccine to first and second grade school children through the Oak Park Health Department without first conducting public informational sessions to disclose risks to the parents of the potential vaccinees in his community. This decision caused the Oak Park Village Board to threaten him with dismissal on May 7, 1955 and the local newspaper to attack him. He was vindicated the next day, May 8, when the United States Health Service abruptly withdrew the vaccine from the market for reasons of safety.

After a time, the United States Public Health Service resumed the vaccine program, blaming the Cutter Company's manufacturing procedures for the outbreak of polio that the vaccine caused in the western states. But Dr. Ratner knew, as many did not, that the Cutter Company had in no way been to blame in its procedures, rather the fault was in Salk's formulation itself at that time. Dr. Ratner was aware that vaccine manufactured by other pharmaceutical companies had caused polio cases in other parts of the country.

Not able to get the unpublicized story of the vaccine's serious flaws into the medical journals, Dr. Ratner contented himself temporarily with documenting it for his own records. At one point, he and two other Chicago-area physician friends planned to use themselves as guinea pigs by taking the vaccine and doing blood titers on themselves afterwards to see whether or not new antibodies had formed. However, they abandoned this plan after initial blood tests showed that one of them lacked the antibodies to the most deadly strain of polio. The project had to be abandoned as too dangerous.

The vaccine that Dr. Ratner and his friends had planned to test on themselves remained in his refrigerator for forty years. He saved the vaccine, knowing that this type of vaccine had caused physical harm to the persons it was intended to help. He also knew the developers of the injected vaccine in the 50s had been lacking in forthrightness in their reporting of the process used to develop and evaluate the vaccine, even going so far as to change their definition of polio after the introduction of the vaccine, thereby making the vaccine appear more successful than it really was. And he felt the United States Public Health Service had been

lacking in standard scientific caution when it rushed the vaccine program, succumbing to media pressure fueled by the drug companies and the National Federation for Infantile Paralysis.

He furthermore had reason to believe that the drug companies and the National Federation for Infantile Paralysis had used improper influence and that, as a result, an improper relationship had developed between the government health agencies, the Foundation, and the companies.

After learning of the 1960 discovery by government researcher Bernice Eddy that hamsters injected with monkey-kidney vaccine-growing mixture developed tumors, Dr. Ratner had a new concern about the 1955-63 Salk Vaccine. That concern grew as time went on. During the 90s, he searched unsuccessfully for someone to analyze the vaccine he had kept stored in a cardboard box in his refrigerator for so long, in little vials containing a pinkish fluid. Aware of the mounting new evidence of potentially deleterious effects of monkey viruses on human health, he increased his efforts. In February, 1997, at the age of eighty-nine, he traveled to a National Institutes of Health meeting in Bethesda, MD, to attend a workshop entitled "Simian Virus 40, A Possible Cause of Human Polyoma Virus." There, he met for the first time molecular pathologist Dr. Michele Carbone, of the Loyola Medical Center, Cardinal Bernardin Cancer Center in Maywood, IL. Dr. Carbone had recently discovered monkey viruses in human lung-lining tumors.

Dr. Ratner invited the young internationally-known cancer researcher to his home and there, to Dr. Carbone's amazement, gave him vials of the vaccine which may be the only original Salk vaccine still in existence. Previously, Dr. Carbone had been told by government health agencies that all of the original vaccine had been discarded. Using these vials, Dr. Carbone was able to demonstrate for the first time that the same strain of monkey virus now being found in certain human tumors was present in the original Salk vaccine. Two years after Dr. Ratner's death, Dr. Carbone's finding was published in *Cancer Research*, December 15, 1999, under the title "Unique Strains of SV40 in Commercial Poliovaccines from 1955 Not Readily Identifiable with Current Testing for SV40 Infection," with the name Herbert Ratner appearing as co-author in recognition of his contribution of the rare vials of 1955 vaccine. Described in the February 2000 *Atlantic Monthly* article, "The Virus and the Vaccine," Carbone's research supplies what appears to be the missing link between the '55-'63 Salk vaccine and certain types of human cancer which have become more common in recent decades. Says Dr. Carbone of Dr. Ratner's role, "He did a great service by saving the vaccine."