

## Health Care in China

TO THE EDITOR: I find it ironic that the article "Health Care in China—An Individual Responsibility" appeared in the December issue under the rubric of "Informed Opinion." It might better have been labeled "Uninformed Opinion" or "Totally Uncritical Sycophancy." I hope you will endeavor to balance this lopsided view of the alleged triumphs of health care in Communist China under Mao Tse Tung with a more objective report in the future.

We are told that after efforts begun in 1965 "the health status of a quarter of the world's population appears to have improved substantially and dramatically within the past few years." The references cited are dated from 1973 to 1976, so that at the very outside, these remarkable changes took place over an 11-year span. Further, "the life span has increased from 40 to 70 years; infant mortality levels now rank among the lowest in the world; undernutrition, venereal disease, drug addiction and several of the most devastating epidemic diseases have been virtually wiped out. . . ."

Particularly intriguing to me is the feat of compacting time so as to measure a 30-year increase in longevity in a 10-year period (all the more impressive because with the Cultural Revolution the number of people clubbed to death by the Red Guards would be expected to have a serious adverse effect on longevity increases achieved through improved health care).

Oh yes! The flies were all eradicated by the Communists long before the Cultural Revolution. Why did it take so much longer to eliminate venereal disease, drug addiction, undernutrition and poverty (the soil that nurtures so much human disease, as anyone trained in public health knows)?

I find that some otherwise erudite and sophisticated medical colleagues will swallow whole any

contrived data and showcase studies emanating from totalitarian countries, and the more preposterous the claims, the less critically they pass into the decerebrate central nervous system, there to be regrouped and articulated in printed form, and published in a learned tome.

THAYER A. SMITH, MD  
*Hawaiian Gardens, California*

## Creased Earlobe Syndrome: A New Wrinkle?

TO THE EDITOR: The creased earlobe syndrome and its possible relation to hypertension as a pathognomonic sign have been of interest to the medical profession for a number of years. The article by Nicholas L. Petrakis in the January 1980 issue of the journal is very interesting and well written.

I have creased earlobes, and have had known hypertension for the past six years, though asymptomatic. I am on a regimen of antihypertensive medications. I also had three back operations 20 years ago, and since then have been unable to sleep comfortably in the supine position. Because I am much more comfortable on my left side, I sleep at least 80 percent on this side. I have two deep diagonal creases on my left earlobe, but only one rather shallow crease on my right. I have noted this for many years, and am also aware that when I do sleep in the side-lying position, my earlobe, which is rather large, is invariably folded over. I likewise have many more creases beneath my left eye than I do under my right one.

Before the creased earlobe syndrome gets into the medical dictionary as being pathognomonic of heart disease, perhaps someone should make a study of earlobes of people with chronic back problems. Maybe this will eventually turn out to be the "oh my aching back" sign.

C. ARTHUR SPAULDING, JR., MD  
*Monterey, California*