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BAHNSON, CLAUD

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Greater success likely in cancer forecasting

CAREFREE, ARIZONA: Forecasting who is likely to develop cancer should now be possible with far greater success than in the past.

Enough is known about the emotional state in association with cancer to allow a "cancer-prone personality" to be outlined. And what ultimately makes a person susceptible to cancer may be a psychologically triggered alteration in his immune defence.

Ten years

These views and some experiments to support them were reported at a science-writers' seminar of the American Cancer Society.

The personality sketch was drawn by Dr. Claus Bahnson, PhD, senior research scientist at the Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute in Philadelphia.

For more than ten years he has been testing and inter-

viewing hundreds of cancer patients comparing them with healthy people, and, more recently, with coronary patients and people with a variety of other somatic diseases.

Repression

In general, he said, the cancer patient represses all unpleasant "affect states" such as anxiety, depression, hostility, or guilt much more effectively than others.

As a result, he feels stress in his job the least, also recent stress of any kind or psychic anxiety, and is further from the competitive, restless, anxiety-laden pattern associated with myocardial infarction.

Dr. Bahnson said that the typical cancer patient looks back on a childhood that was "bleak and unsatisfying." He remembers his parents as unprotecting, his mother unloving and his father undemanding.

He leads a normal, commonsense sort of existence, but one

"unrelated to his basic needs for affection, warmth and personal creativity.

"The cancer patient is a nice guy," said Dr. Bahnson, and he has great difficulty dealing with or expressing anger.

Compared statistically with both healthy people and those with other ailments, the cancer patient represses his emotions to a significantly greater extent.

At present, Dr. Bahnson is working with cancer specialists and immunologists to try and pin-point a relationship between affect and stress states and immune reactions in cancer patients compared with healthy people.

30 per cent

He believes that on a purely empirical basis, it should be possible to screen psychologically a random group of people and get a 30 per cent improvement in forecasting the ones most likely to develop cancer.