

diet, habits and perhaps environmental factors can be inferred from the huge discrepancies in the prevalence of the disease among different countries. The United States ranks second in the international ratings and it occurs ten times more frequently there than in Japan. This discrepancy led Dr Charles K. Friedberg, a member of the task force, to suggest last week that if Americans were prepared to alter their diets and stop smoking cigarettes, the incidence of the disease might be cut by 90 per cent.

Among the chief recommendations of the task force are the following:

- Several centres devoted to the study and treatment of all factors of arteriosclerosis should be established in existing hospitals and universities. At present, the task force reports, "the effort is fragmented into small programs at many universities and hospitals. These programs, excellent as many of them are, do not encompass a multidisciplinary attack on arteriosclerosis". Called National Centers for the Prevention of Arteriosclerosis, the centres would be focal points for the study, detection, prevention, arrest and reversal of the disease, and they might be modelled on other mission-oriented government research centres such as the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory or the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.
- Smaller cardiovascular disease prevention clinics should be established within the framework of existing health care. Charged with the task of screening persons to detect those most at risk, the clinics would also serve as a means of collecting together information on the prevalence of the disease and its dependence on different factors.
- The task force also suggests that an Office of Health Education should be established in the National Heart and Lung Institute to serve as a clearing house for information on arteriosclerosis. The office would be partly responsible for public education about the risks associated with, for example, cigarette smoking, and about the advisability of having regular checks of blood pressure.
- As far as research is concerned, the task force suggests that "efforts aimed at primary prevention of arteriosclerosis are not based on adequate information", and that "a vigorous effort of basic and applied research will provide the knowledge required for efficient prevention programs". The research would be carried out primarily in the suggested National Centers for the Prevention of Arteriosclerosis, although the report suggests a large scale programme of applied research to test the so-called risk factor hypothesis. The chief problem with such trials, however, is that they would involve large numbers of patients to be studied over long

periods of time, but with the increase in the number of patients under treatment in the national centres, the task force believes that several important questions concerning the causal relationship between factors such as high blood lipid content and high blood pressure can be resolved.

- The task force also recommends that the National Heart and Lung Institute should engage in an expanded programme of basic research to elucidate, for example, factors governing the levels of lipids in the blood, and the mechanisms whereby genetics, hypertension and cigarette smoking affect the formation of fatty deposits on arterial walls.

Dr Paul has described the recommendations of the task force as "a broad, aggressive, realistic program deserving the support of the President, the Congress and of the people". Since the NIH budget is now being negotiated in the Office of Management and Budget, such a report could conceivably have an effect on the institute's funds for next year, and if the report does launch a campaign designed to cut down the incidence of the disease, it is likely to find many friends in Congress. One major difference between this report and last year's report of the panel of consultants on cancer, however, is that the argument is unlikely to be sidetracked into one of organization, because the task force thankfully makes no recommendations for taking arteriosclerosis research outside the National Institutes of Health.

OCEAN MAMMALS

Not Enough Protection

by our Washington Correspondent

UNDER the blind eye of the International Whaling Commission, eight species of whales have been ruthlessly hunted to the verge of extinction. Commercial greed has been the chief factor which has forced the commission's weak and toothless machinery consistently to allow whaling fleets to kill off more whales each year than their rapidly declining numbers can sustain. And, as a monument to bureaucratic controls that allow too much leeway to the commercial interests they are designed to regulate, the International Whaling Commission provides a good example of what not to do. That is one reason why the House of Representatives has chosen to throw out a bill designed to protect all ocean mammals, but whose secondary aim is to "obtain an optimum sustained yield" of the animals for commercial exploitation.

In many respects, backers of the bill were hoist with their own petard, for the bill was brought to the floor of the House under suspension of the rules—

a device designed to expedite the passage of uncontroversial legislation which allows no amendments to be brought, and which requires that the bill receive a two-thirds majority to pass. Those who wanted to give the bill more teeth were therefore forced to vote against it, and it received an absolute but not a two-thirds majority.

The bill was voted down essentially because it was felt that the shameful history of marine mammal conservation, which has allowed species after species to become almost if not entirely extinct, requires the taking of more drastic action than simply improving the controls on the giving of licences for hunting the animals. In short, what most opponents of the bill want is a complete moratorium on the killing and harassing of all ocean mammals by United States citizens, and a ban on imports into the country of products derived from these animals (the products are mostly luxury goods).

But the bill brought to the floor of the House by the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, although it would have led to a moratorium on the taking of some particularly endangered species of marine mammals, also included provisions allowing the Secretary of Commerce or the Secretary of the Interior to grant permits for the taking of other marine mammals. Before such a permit could have been granted, the bill specified that the likely effect on the species would have to be taken into account, and the whole process would be open to public hearing. The granting of such permits would, however, be subject to commercial pressures, and with the glaring example of the International Whaling Commission to hold up, opponents of the measure had enough big guns to shoot it down.

One of the chief reasons that the bill would have allowed the taking of some species of marine mammals is to permit effective management of mammal populations which might become too numerous for their habitats—the situation in the Farne Islands, where the British policy of stopping the killing of seals has led to overcrowding, disease and starvation among the animals was cited as an example. But in the majority of the cases—for example, the wanton destruction of polar bears in Alaska by hunters in the name of "sport", and the commercial exploitation of whales to the point of their extinction—the situation is such that strong controls are essential.

Although the bill has been technically killed by the vote, it may be resurrected and brought back to the House under the normal procedure, thus allowing amendments that would put the necessary teeth into the legislation. That is what most of those who voted it down are hoping.