COMMENTARY ON "ACTIVE IMMUNIZATION AGAINST POLIOMYELITIS"

SAMUEL L. KATZ, MD*

In his 1953 review of the state of development of vaccines to prevent paralytic poliomyelitis, written two years before the availability of Salk's inactivated polio virus vaccine, Dr. Cox, a respected investigator at the Lederle Laboratories, presented all of the appropriate background and the future potential for polio prevention. His laboratory was one of the first to work with live attenuated polio viruses, similar to those that eventually were brought to licensure by Albert Sabin.

As a strong proponent of live-virus vaccines, Cox reviewed impartially the developments to that time in both inactivated and attenuated preparations. Quite prophetically, he called attention to the problems of contamination of animal tissues that might be used for either product and raised issues that are prominent even today. Although he failed to achieve his goal of culturing all three types of polio virus in chick embryo, repeating the success of that time with yellow fever and rabies viruses, Cox's prognostication of the line of development of an attenuated vaccine was precisely on target. From a historic point of view, his paper is valuable in that it also sketches much of the evolution of vaccines through the efforts of such distinguished workers as Morgan, Howe, Enders, Rhodes, Evans, Koprowski, and Theiler, among others.

Samuel L. Katz

June 1998

*Dr. Katz is Wilburt C. Davison Professor, Emeritus, Department of Pediatrics, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, NC 27710.