

## PHARMACY *a long and proud history*

# OCTOPUSSY

As the story continues with its many players the title **Octopussy** seems most appropriate considering the many tentacles weaving around the question "who caused the heart attack?"

Following the pioneering efforts of Dr J Gofman's findings about the role of LDL cholesterol in heart disease, not much attention was paid to the issue for the next ten years. Then in 1952 **Lawrence Kinsell** and his group working in a general hospital in Alameda, California, discovered that eating plant foods and avoiding animal fats significantly *decreased cholesterol blood levels*. However, the hospital's administrators and most doctors were not impressed enough by his findings to allocate beds for patients in his studies. Also as the hospital was not known for scientific research he could not obtain research grants. Frustrated and depressed by the impossibility of continuing his studies, Kinsell committed suicide.

Then in 1958 **William Dock** from Stanford University Medical School wrote an article for the official journal of the *American Heart Association (AHA)* and the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The article was highly critical of cardiac researchers for their half-century of neglect of **Dr Anichkov's** findings. But worse still was the neglect of thirty or more reports that had followed the Russian studies. All the studies to date had one thing in common: they pointed to **dietary cholesterol** having a key role in thickening arteries.

We next come to **Dr Ancel Keys** who, when he was at the University of Minnesota during the Second World War, created the high calorie supplement pack for troops called the **K Ration** (forerunner of energy snack bars)

consisting of hard sausage, dried biscuits, chocolate, chewing gum, matches and cigarettes in a waterproof pack. Following the war he focused on *cholesterol and hardened arteries*, promoting the hypothesis that it was the cholesterol in food (in combination with other fats) that raised blood cholesterol levels, causing cholesterol to enter and thicken artery walls, thus increasing heart attack risk. By the mid 1950s Ancel Keys and

others were convinced – after many interesting, confusing and conflicting studies in the USA and overseas – that the epidemic of coronary heart disease was caused by a **nutritional disorder**.

But in 1957 the *American Heart Association (AHA)* invited a group of heart specialists to evaluate Keys' hypothesis. *They found they could not endorse it.*

They found the evidence did not have any specific implications for drastic dietary change. However, such was the concern over *coronary heart disease (CHD)* that risk factors were starting to be identified. These included smoking, raised blood pressure, and high blood cholesterol. Events

over the 1960s to 1990s showed clearly that simply reducing the consumption of fat would not and did not reduce the incidence of CHD.

Notwithstanding all the above, **Keys** was an important and influential contributor to the knowledge surrounding CHD. He died of old age during his 102<sup>nd</sup> year.

*The problem is the facts as we read them keep getting in the way of the truth.*

Ron Wilson

**Next issue: guinea pigs, vitamin C, trans fats.**

