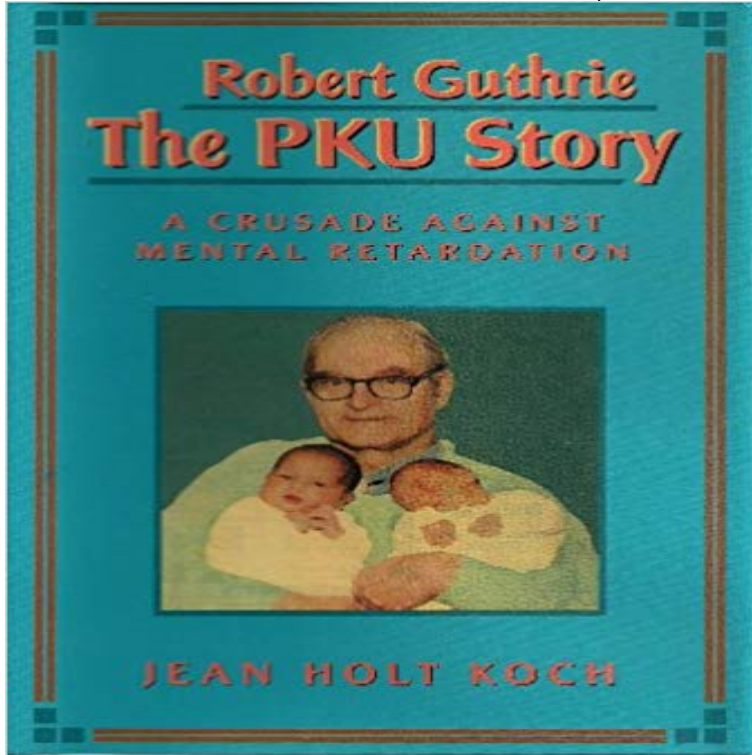


Robert Guthrie--The Pku Story: Crusade Against Mental Retardation



All newborns in the U.S. and in many parts of the world now have a couple of drops of blood drawn from their heels in order to test them for PKU and a host of other genetic disorders that can cause mental retardation or premature death if not treated immediately. This is the biography of the man best known for his development of newborn screening for PKU. Yet this was only one of his prodigious accomplishments. Tests were developed in Bob Guthrie's laboratory for more than 30 treatable disorders that cause mental retardation or death, giving the term newborn screening fresh meaning. He also waged a battle against lead poisoning long before the public or the medical community became concerned about this danger and was a member of the Physicians for Social Responsibility—an organization devoted to preventing nuclear war and opposing nuclear weapons testing. Review in CHOICE: Koch shares the warm story of a man dedicated to the prevention of mental retardation. Guthrie (1916-95), an MD with a PhD in bacteriology, developed an inexpensive diagnostic technique allowing newborn screening for phenylketonuria (PKU) to become universal. The importance of this technique became clear once researchers demonstrated that the destructive effects of PKU, including certain types of mental retardation, could be arrested by restricted protein consumption. The analysis of dried blood samples collected on filter paper disks led to the early detection and treatment of a number of medical disorders in newborns, thus facilitating the prevention of devastating effects. Guthrie was willing to crusade for universal newborn screening on his own, but he also gained the support of caring practitioners around the world. Perhaps Guthrie's passion for promoting newborn screening was fueled by his son, who was a victim of untreated PKU. The son was born before

PKU was identified as a hereditary enzymatic defect and effective early interventions were developed. Guthrie's story also highlights advances made in the medical community as scientists interacted professionally and personally sharing a common concern. All levels. (L. G. Worthy, Andrew College, Choice: February 1998 Vol. 35 No. 6) Review from DIVISION OF INTERNATIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SERVICES Newsletter -- While this is obviously a biography of the inventor of the assay disinhibition test for phenylalanine, it is much more. The test which Bob Guthrie developed enabled physician/nutritionist/ dietitian teams to identify children born with the double recessive gene condition known as phenylketonuria (PKU) and institute dietary treatment early enough to prevent brain damage and mental retardation. That alone would have earned him a place in history--but Jean Koch carefully describes his two other major contributions: development of the collection of blood specimens as spots on filter paper for multiple testing, and his tireless efforts throughout the world in identifying etiological factors and promoting means of preventing mental retardation. Besides introducing the blood test for PKU, Galactosemia and other inborn metabolic errors, Bob was able to identify one of the major causes of lead poisoning in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. His sabbatical leave in 1968 in New Zealand included efforts to introduce newborn screening into the Pacific Islands. Following his stay in Dunedin, New Zealand, Bob and his family continued to work their way around the world, from Australia, South Africa, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavia and the British Isles. DISES members who think they have seen the world need to read this fascinating account! As Dr. L. I Woolf notes in the Preface, This book is a worthy monument in honor of a man to whom the world owes much. (reviewed by R. Henderson, Division Of International

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