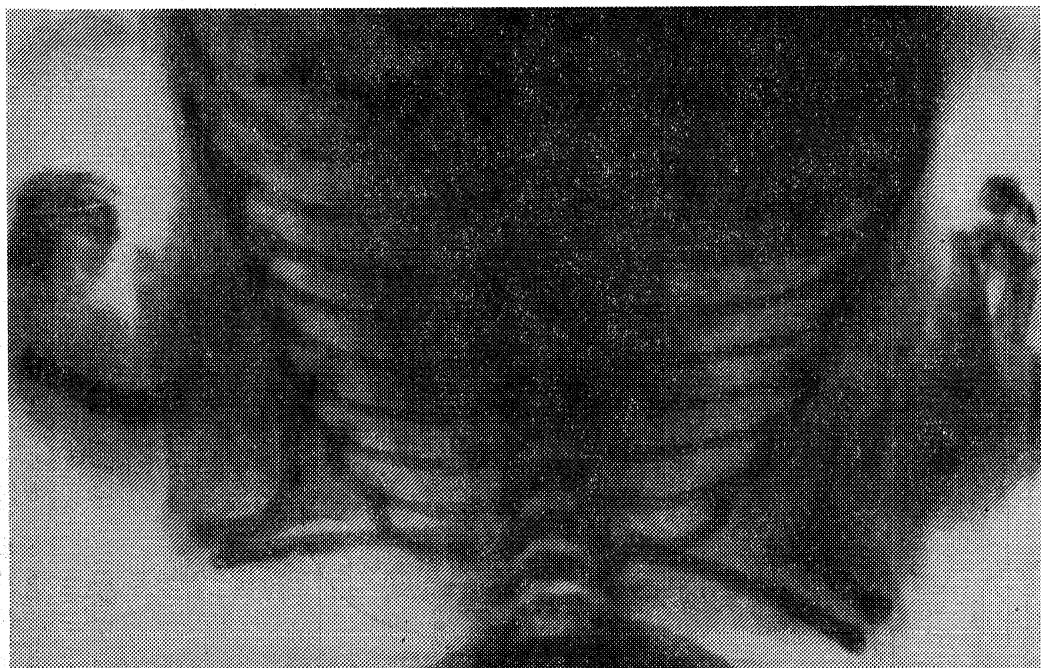


drome" and said that he had warned the manufacturer. That night a physician came up to Lenz and said: "Will you tell me confidentially, is the drug Contergan? I ask because we have such a child and my wife took Contergan." Before the meeting was over the doctors generally knew that Lenz suspected Contergan.

On November 26 Grünenthal withdrew the drug and all compounds containing it from the market. Two days later the West Germany Ministry of Health issued a firm but cautious statement that Contergan was suspected as the major factor in causing phocomelia. Radio and television stations and the front pages of newspapers promptly carried announcements warning women not to take the drug.

On the other side of the world W. G. McBride, a physician in New South Wales, Australia, saw three newborn babies with severe phocomelia during April, 1961. In October and November he saw three more. From the histories of the mothers he found that all six had taken Distaval in early pregnancy. McBride notified the Australian branch of Distillers Ltd. and it cabled his findings to the London headquarters on November 27. This and the news from Germany caused the firm to withdraw the drug on December 3. Because of the demand by physicians it has been returned to limited sale in England, but in Germany it is now illegal to possess thalidomide.

The news of the Australian experience prompted A. L. Speirs, a physician of Stirlingshire, Scotland, to review 10 cases of phocomelia that he had seen in his practice during the preceding months. By checking prescription records and medicine cabinets in the victims' homes, he obtained positive proof that eight of the mothers had taken Distaval in early pregnancy.



Typical Phocomelia, or "seal limb," is readily apparent in this X ray of chest, shoulders and arms of West German infant. In "classic" phocomelia usually only one arm was affected. Phocomelia caused by thalidomide almost always deforms both arms.

Thus in the last weeks of 1961 circumstantial evidence accumulating in various parts of the world indicated that thalidomide played an important role in the causation of phocomelia. Physicians now began asking women who were still pregnant about their experience with the drug. One obstetrician in Germany asked 65 pregnant women if they had taken Contergan in early pregnancy. Only one said that she had. The physician declared that if she had an abnormal baby, he would believe Lenz. She did!

A drug with a molecular structure similar to that of thalidomide is Doriden, also used as a sedative. Although in a few cases of phocomelia the mother says she took Doriden, not Contergan, Doriden has been widely used in Switzerland