

Nurse treated cancer with herbs

A requiem mass will be said today in Bracebridge for Renee Caisse, a registered nurse who became the centre of a medical controversy with her claim that an Indian herbal formula given to her 56 years ago could cure cancer.

Mrs. Caisse died on Tuesday in South Muskoka Memorial Hospital at 90 of complications resulting from a fall in her home several weeks ago.

The controversy over the herbal remedy, which she named Essiac (her surname spelled backward), goes back more than 40 years and in 1938 it reached the floor of the Ontario Legislature.

Mrs. Caisse refused to reveal the formula then unless the Ontario Commission for the Investigation of Cancer Remedies recognized its merit and guaranteed that it would be used on cancer patients.

A private member's bill to permit her to practice medicine was introduced in the Legislature but rejected by the private bills committee on the grounds that it would endorse the treatment as an effective cure.

Later an act was passed requiring anyone treating cancer in the province to submit the formula and samples to the commission for investigating cancer remedies.

In 1939 a cancer commission report said that evidence given at the hearings did not justify any favorable conclusion on the merits of Essiac.

Tests on animals in the Brusch Medical Centre in Cambridge, Mass., and the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre in New York were inconclusive. She refused an offer by Sir Frederick Banting, the co-discoverer of insulin, to work with him because she said the offer would mean she would have to give up treating patients during the test.

In June, 1977, Mrs. Caisse announced that after keeping the formula secret for 55 years she had revealed it to an organization she refused to name and hoped that it would ultimately be made available to "suffering humanity."

Two months later she gave the formula in trust to Lieutenant-Governor Pauline McGibbon in a sealed envelope.

the federal Ministry of Health and Welfare gave permission to Respin Corp. of Toronto to test the remedy on humans. Dr. P. B. Rynard, chairman of the company and Progressive Conservative member of Parliament for Simcoe North, said yesterday that the testing is continuing.

Mrs. Caisse's story goes back to 1922 when she was working in a hospital in Haileybury and received the formula from a woman who said it had cured her breast cancer. In an interview in 1977 Mrs. Caisse said she

gave little thought to the remedy until two years later when her aunt was in the final stages of cancer.

She collected the herbs, which are native to Ontario, and treated her aunt, who lived another 20 years, Mrs. Caisse said.

During the 1920s and 1930s she provided treatment to cancer patients in Toronto and Peterborough. Government and medical authorities attempted to stop her but gave up because she was not charging for the remedy and was accepting only voluntary payments.