

Norman Cousins to lecture

January 25, 1980

"The will to live is not a theoretical abstraction, but a physiologic reality with therapeutic characteristics," says Norman Cousins, author of the newly published book, "Anatomy of an Illness."

Cousins, currently a member of the faculty of the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences of the School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles, will speak at the University of California, San Diego at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 5.

The free public lecture, titled "Medical Ethics and Professional Responsibilities to the Public in Biomedical Science," will be given in the Mandeville Auditorium. Tickets are required and can be obtained at the UCSD Central Box Office, 452-4559, or by mail by writing to the Career Planning and Placement Office, B-030, La Jolla, CA 92093.

Cousins was editor for 35 years of the Saturday Review and he holds honorary degrees in literature, science and law from 38 colleges and universities. He has received numerous honors and awards, including the United Nations Peace Medal, the Eleanor Roosevelt Peace Award, the Gold Medal for Literature Award of the National Arts Club and the Personal Medallion of Pope John XXIII. He has carried out diplomatic missions for Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson.

In 1964, Cousins was told by doctors that he had an irreversible crippling disease and had a -one in 500 chance of full recovery. His book, an enlargement of an article which appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1976, describes his refusal to accept this diagnosis and his efforts to combat the illness on his own.

His first step towards recovery was rejecting the traditional hospital care and pain-killers which were prescribed for him.

"I had a fast-growing conviction that a hospital was no place for a person who was seriously ill," he wrote in his original article. He moved into a hotel room and under the supervision of his personal doctor, he began taking concentrated dosages of ascorbic acid in place of the drugs which he had been taking.

Since Cousins believed the theory that negative emotions can produce chemical changes in the body, he decided to see if positive emotions might produce a beneficial change.

Not only did Cousins adopt a positive attitude about his condition; he had his nurse read to him from humorous books, and he watched slapstick comedies which were shown to him as he lay immobile in his bed in the hotel room.

"I made the joyous discovery that 10 minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anaesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep," he said.

Today, Cousins appears to be fully recovered from the disease. Though he does not advocate that his methods would work for other patients, he questions the absolute wisdom of medical science and he believes in the power of positive thinking.

Cousins' appearance at UC San Diego is the second in a series called "Future Perspectives in American Health Care," which opened with the recent talk on campus by Senator Ted Kennedy. The series is sponsored by the Health Sciences Advisory Program of the Career Planning and Placement Office and the Health Experience Learning Program, a student organization.

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