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Soaring Quinine Prices Probed

United Press International

Congressional investigators are looking into drastic increases in the price of quinine used to treat heart patients and to combat a new and tougher strain of malaria striking down United States servicemen in Vietnam.

A spokesman for the Senate Antitrust and Monopoly Subcommittee held out the possibility of hearings on quinine prices, which have jumped five times since 1964 and prompted public complaints to a number of Congressmen.

The wholesale price of quinidine, a quinine drug used in heart therapy, has risen from 78 cents an ounce in 1962 to about \$3.80 an ounce. Similar increases have been noted in other quinine prices in the same period.

The Subcommittee aide said both foreign and domestic prices were being studied. "There's no doubt that U.S. firms have been charged higher prices by foreign producers," he said.

Investigators are trying to determine whether a shortage

has triggered higher prices or whether suppliers have been withholding quinine from world markets to boost profits.

Quinine once again became a front-line remedy against malaria in 1964 when Dr. Joseph Burckhalter of the University of Michigan announced that the fight against the disease had been "set back 25 years" by the emergence of a new strain called falciparum.

Other forms of malaria had been conquered by synthetic drugs that replaced quinine.

As a result, Indonesia and other producers cut back their quinine production. From a 1940 level of 16,371 metric tons, Indonesia's output declined to 2087 metric tons in 1962.

The falciparum strain of malaria was first spotted in 1961 in Southeast Asia, Latin America, Africa and other tropical areas. Several U.S. drug firms are now trying to create a synthetic effective against the tougher strain. The Army also has begun a crash research program to find an antidote.