



From 1951 to 1954, before the Salk vaccine, polio caused 65,000 cases of paralysis in the United States.

INSPIRATION, EXPIRATION

In the lobby of the Pitt Public Health building is a sobering public service announcement of sorts: an iron lung, about 8 feet long, cordoned off in front of a window overlooking the former site of Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. In the ’40s and ’50s, hospitals around the world tended to thousands of patients in these devices, which used negative pressure to draw air into their lungs. Children and young adults paralyzed by severe polio typically spent weeks inside them; some didn’t survive.

This April, nearly 63 years to the day after the announcement was made that the killed poliovirus vaccine developed by Pitt’s Jonas Salk and his research team was a success, the iron lung debuted as a new permanent display. Don Burke, dean of the Graduate School of Public Health and associate vice chancellor for global health, had wanted one for years before he finally tracked it down with help from Salk’s son, Peter Salk, a part-time Pitt professor of infectious diseases and microbiology. The Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, San Diego, Calif., donated the device. “It’s such a potent symbol of what happens when you don’t have vaccines and preventives,” says Burke. “Because of a vaccine, this kind of requirement disappeared.” —Elaine Vitone