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Schizophrenia: intermittent treatment with neuroleptics

The value of continuous neuroleptic treatment in preventing relapse in schizophrenia is now well established, but over the past decade concern has mounted over the potential side effects of long term exposure to these agents. Principal among potential adverse effects are parkinsonism, akathisia, and tardive dyskinesia. This concern has prompted a search not only for new pharmacological agents but also for new strategies of prophylaxis with existing agents which reduce drug exposure and side effects. One such strategy, evaluated by Jolley *et al* (p 985), aims at identifying early non-psychotic signs of relapse and keeping patients drug free until the development of such signs. Over one year Jolley *et al* found that intermittent drug treatment of early signs was as effective as continuous neuroleptic dosing in averting the need for admission to hospital and was associated with less exposure to drugs, fewer extrapyramidal side effects, and possibly a lower risk of tardive dyskinesia than continuous dosing. These advantages were accrued at the expense of a greater frequency of episodes of both psychotic and neurotic or dysphoric symptoms. The authors conclude that the intermittent treatment strategy may be a useful alternative to continuous neuroleptic prophylaxis in selected schizophrenic patients who either refuse continuous treatment or suffer disabling side effects from existing neuroleptic agents.

Emotionalism after stroke

The orthodox view of emotional lability is that it is a disorder seen mostly in patients with bilateral brain damage, in whom the emotional expression does not match the patient's true feelings. The common problem of emotionalism following stroke does not fit well with this account as it may occur even after minor and unilateral strokes. It is often therefore thought of differently—as an understandable part of the picture of adjustment to a frightening and potentially life-threatening illness. On p 991 the Oxfordshire community stroke project reports results suggesting that these standard explanations need re-examining. Although the project found that much emotionalism was "appropriate," it was more likely in larger lesions and in lesions in the left frontal and temporal regions—suggesting a specific role for brain damage in the cause of emotionalism, even after unilateral stroke.

Outcome of pregnancy in Finland after Chernobyl

In April 1986 an explosion and fire destroyed the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl in the south west of the Soviet Union. Developing fetuses were considered to be especially at risk from the radioactive material released. Hard information on any harmful consequences has, however, been difficult to come by. Finland received fairly heavy radioactive fallout, and great variations within the country offered a good

opportunity to explore the possible harmful effect of the radiation. On p 995 Harjulehto *et al* report that the incidence of congenital malformations and its differences in time and place in Finland did not confirm a teratogenic effect of the radiation. The incidence of premature births among malformed children, however, was higher in the most heavily polluted areas.

Blood lipids and ischaemic heart disease

Although serum total cholesterol concentration is well established as an important risk factor for ischaemic heart disease, the relevance of high density lipoprotein cholesterol and triglyceride concentrations remains controversial. On p 998 Pocock *et al* give further prospective evidence from the British regional heart study of the importance of these three blood lipids in predicting ischaemic heart disease. In 7.5 years of follow up 443 out of 7735 middle aged men had a major ischaemic event (fatal and non-fatal). Among blood lipids total cholesterol concentration was the most predictive single risk factor, high density lipoprotein cholesterol concentration's inverse association with risk was less important, and serum triglyceride concentrations did not help in prediction. Thus measurement of high density lipoprotein cholesterol concentration in addition to total cholesterol concentration may be of only marginal value in screening and intervention programmes in the general population. Also, any widespread use of measurements of triglyceride concentration and drugs for lowering that concentration may be unjustified.



Characteristic appearance of *Campylobacter jejuni* enteritis on ultrasonography, described by de Bois *et al* on p 1004