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Aluminium sulphate in drinking water: were fetuses affected?

In July 1988, when the water supply in north Cornwall was contaminated with aluminium sulphate, 93 women in the area were pregnant. Golding *et al* compared their outcome of pregnancy with that of women not exposed to aluminium sulphate (p 1175). There was no evidence that the incident had any deleterious effect on fetal growth or survival. All six of the defects that could possibly be linked with the incident were mild, consisting mainly of talipes (four cases). Follow up of these children is underway to ascertain internal malformations and any problems in motor or mental development or in behaviour and temperament.

Maternal history of non-insulin dependent diabetic patients

The increasing use of computerised databases and an aid to medical audit has had the added benefit of providing valuable research potential. On p 1178, Alcolado and Alcolado have departed from recent molecular genetic studies of non-insulin dependent diabetes by reporting the family histories of over 1300 patients with the disease included in a diabetic service's database. The high heritability of the disease was confirmed. In patients with one affected parent, mothers were affected more than twice as often as would be expected by chance. This result was confirmed by postal questionnaire and could not be explained by sex differences in the ages at onset of the disease or ages at death of parents. The study also found no evidence that parity affects the incidence of diabetes in women.

GP contract: reactions and impact

Since April 1990, when the new contract was introduced, general practitioners have had to adapt their practices to accommodate the reorganisation of general medical services. On p 1183 Bain describes the effect this had had on five contrasting practices in the United Kingdom, the opportunities arising from the new contract, the reactions of the general practitioners and support staff to the changes, and the future direction of the practices.

Home nebulisers for childhood asthma

Increased loaning of home nebulisers has improved the quality of life for many asthmatic children by facilitating drug administration and reducing hospital inpatient care. The policy means, however, that parents carry far more responsibility for managing their child's asthma. On p 1180 Bendefy reports the results of a

survey of 93 asthmatic children using home nebulisers for taking bronchodilators under hospital supervision after verbal instructions to parents. Parents' responses to a questionnaire suggested that over half the children were likely to receive excessive doses of bronchodilators, and the theoretical responses of almost a fifth of parents to a severe asthma attack were inappropriate and could have had toxic or fatal consequences. The author suggests that the dose of bronchodilator should be related to weight and that parents should be given written as well as verbal instructions.

Pressure from patients for referral

The reasons why general practitioners refer patients to hospital have taken on further significance in the new NHS with the need to commission services that match general practitioners' referral patterns. Armstrong *et al* (p 1186) explored the contribution of the interaction between doctors and patients to referral pattern by analysis of the amount of pressure for a referral recorded by 122 general practitioners in response to individual patients. Greater pressure was experienced by younger general practitioners, those who trained in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, and for referrals for reassurance and for a private consultation. Pressure varied in referrals to different specialties. Also, general practitioners who referred at a higher rate than their colleagues tended to report experiencing higher levels of pressure for the referral.

Two tier system for referrals for coronary heart disease

Doctors in the United Kingdom, which has a mortality from coronary heart disease among the highest in the Western world, perform relatively few coronary bypass procedures. Various possible explanations for this disparity include the suggestions that either British cardiologists refer fewer patients for revascularisation or that there is a serious shortfall in provision, such that demand outstrips the capabilities of the health service. On p 1189 Marber *et al* report an increase in waiting times over 10 years for 619 patients with suspected coronary heart disease who were referred for investigation and treatment within the NHS. Over the same 10 years and from the same health district 204 such patients were referred within the private sector without any appreciable increase in waiting time. Fifteen people on the NHS waiting list died, probably of cardiac causes, whereas nobody on the private waiting list died. The authors suggest that the discrepancy between the performance of the NHS and that of the private sector reflects worsening provisions in the South West Thames region.

COMING EVENTS

Royal College of Psychiatrists' Philosophy Group—Conference "The very idea of medical ethics," 22 June, Brighton. Details from Dr Jackie Cassell, Basement Flat, 103 Lansdowne Place, Hove, East Sussex BN3 3TD. (Tel 0273 749546.)

Mental Health Foundation—Conference "The evaluation of mental health services and treatments," 24 June, London. Details from Lucie Reader at the foundation, 8 Hallam Street, London W1N 6DH. (Tel 071 580 0145.)

British Institute of Radiology—29th Conversazione, speaker Sir Stephen Furness, 27 June, London. Details from the conference office of the institute, 36 Portland Place, London W1N 4AT. (Tel 071 436 7807.)

Netherlands Society of Public Health and Science and the Dutch Association of Public Health—Conference "Public health in the United States and in Europe, is there a difference?" 23 August, Amsterdam. Details from QLT/Congrex, Keizersgracht 782, 1017 EC Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Galton Institute for the Study of Biology and Society—Symposium "Sir Francis Galton FRS (1822-1911): the legacy of his ideas," 19-20 September, London. Details from the general secretary of the institute, 19 Northfields Prospect, Northfields, London SW18 1PE. (Tel 081 874 7257.) Admission free by ticket only.

LOROS Palliative Care Research Trust—Meeting "Recent advances in palliative care," 19-20 September, Leicester. Details from the conference secretary of LOROS, Miss Karen Mann, Leicestershire Hospice, Groby Road, Leicester LE3 9QE. (Tel 0533 313771.)

Tissue Viability Society—Conference "Acute aspects of pressure area care," 19-20 September, London. Details from the secretary of the society, John Gisby, Wessex Rehabilitation Association, Odstock Hospital, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP2 8BJ. (Tel 0722 336262 ext 2392.)

University of Bradford Department of Social and Economic Studies—Conference "Race and health in contemporary Britain," 25-27 September, Bradford. Details from the Centre for Continuing Education at the university, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD7 1DP. (Tel 0274 733466 ext 3215/3217.)

American College of Chest Physicians—Fourth international conference "Environmental lung disease, at home at work: mechanisms, manifestations, and management," 25-28 September, Montreal. Details from the college's Division of Education, 3300 Dundee Road, Northbrook, Illinois 60062, USA.

Alberta Lung Association Respiratory Health Care Professionals Section—First respiratory care conference "Hospital to home: working together," 4-6 October, Edmonton. Details from RHCP Conference 1991, c/o the association, 301, 10408-124 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5N 1R5.

Manchester Royal Infirmary Old Residents' Club—Triennial reunion dinner Saturday 5 October, Manchester. Details from the honorary secretary Dr D Neary, Department of Neurology, Manchester Royal Infirmary, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9WL, who would like to hear from members who are out of touch.

British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering—Medical group seminar "Infertility: implications for medical and social work with children and families," 10 October, London. Details from Rose Lang, BAAF, 11 Southwark Street, London SE1 1RQ.

St Thomas's Hospital—Symposium "Medicine and musicians," 11 October, London. Details from the course administrator, Mrs Wendy Mathews, Rheumatology Department, St Thomas's Hospital, London SE1 7EH.

Seventh International Symposium of Nephrology—"Kidney, proteins, and drugs," 14-16 October, Montecatini Terme. Details from Professor Claudio Bianchi, Unità di Nefrologia, Clinica Medica 2, University of Pisa, 56100 Pisa, Italy.

Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh North West Region and Greater London—Annual gathering 1 November, London. Details from Dr Mary Carter, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY. (Tel 071 725 1046.)

National Heart and Lung Institute—Course "Endothelium symposium," 18-20 November, London. Details from

the education manager of the institute, Mrs Sadie Wright, Dovehouse Street, London SW3 6LY. (Tel 071 351 8172.)

Geriatric Educational Aid Centre—International conference "The social dimension of senile dementia," 18-20 November, Copenhagen. Details from the conference secretariat at the centre, 5 Hellasvej, DK 7620 Lemvig, Denmark.

British Medical Ultrasound Society—23rd annual scientific meeting, 10-12 December, Bournemouth. Details from Miss L A Summers of the society, 36 Portland Place, London W1N 3DG. (Tel 071 636 3714.)

International Cooperative Meeting on Inflammatory Bowel Disease—15-17 December, Rome. Details from the secretariat at Divisione di Gastroenterologia, Ospedale Nuovo Regina Margherita, Via Morosini 30, 00153 Rome, Italy.

British Association for Service to the Elderly—Details and copies of the programme of study days to July are available from BASE, 119 Hassell Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire ST5 1AX. (Tel 0782 661033.)

King's Fund Centre for Health Services Development—Details and copies of the programme of lunchtime seminars to end July are available from Linda Moore at the centre, 126 Albert Street, London NW1 7NF. (Tel 071 267 6111 ext 268.)

Marlybone Centre Trust—Details and copies of the programme of summer schools for professionals working in primary health and community care are available from the centre, Regent's College, Regent's Park, London NW1 4NS. (Tel 071 487 7415.)

LECTURES

Monday 20 May

ST GEORGE'S HOSPITAL MEDICAL SCHOOL DEPARTMENT OF GYNAECOLOGY—At Lecture Theatre D, 12.30 pm, Dr J Davies: Delivery after caesarean section.

Tuesday 21 May

ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND—1 pm, Erasmus-Wilson demonstration by Professor Alan Davison: The immunopathology of demyelinating disease and treatment of multiple sclerosis.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PRIMARY CARE—At Wits Lecture Theatre, Radcliffe Infirmary, 5 pm, Litchfield lecture by Dr Richard Farmer (Cleveland, Ohio): Maintaining quality in clinical medicine in the face of competition.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD ICRF CANCER EPIDEMIOLOGY UNIT—At Committee Room, Green College, 1 pm, John Muir: Resources required for in depth nurse health checks and follow up.

Wednesday 22 May

ROYAL POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL SCHOOL—At Stamp Lecture Theatre, 10.15 am, medical staff round. 4.30 pm, distinguished guest lecture by Professor K Winterhalter FRS (Zurich): Why is connective tissue interesting?

Thursday 23 May

CLINICAL RESEARCH CENTRE—In Clinical Lecture Theatre, 4.30 pm, Northwick Park lecture in clinical science by Professor Peter Beverley: How lymphocytes work.

Friday 24 May

ROYAL BROMPTON NATIONAL HEART AND LUNG HOSPITAL—At Paul Wood Lecture Theatre, National Heart and Lung Institute, 8 am, Dr G Knowles and Dr M Sheppard: Pulmonary capillaritis. (Preceded by coffee and rolls 7.30 am.)

BMA MEETINGS

Members proposing to attend meetings marked * are asked to notify in advance the honorary secretary concerned.

Division meetings

Aberystwyth—At Tyglyn Aeron, Ciliau Aeron, Friday 24 May, 7.30 pm, Dr Arthur Chater: "The unique nature of Ceredigion." (Followed by dinner.* Guests welcome.)

Ayrshire and Arran—At Halfway House, Symington, Tuesday 21 May, 7.30 pm, 7.45 pm, Dr G Knowles and Dr M Sheppard: Pulmonary capillaritis. (Preceded by coffee and rolls 7.30 am.)

Croydon—At Mayday Postgraduate Centre, Tuesday 21 May, 8 pm, Dr Corrine Camilleri-Ferrante: "Images of health and disease in the arts." (Preceded by buffet 7.30 pm.)

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