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LEADING ARTICLES

CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

- New Green Paper page 379 Complaints in Hospital page 380 Geography of Primary
Liver Cancer page 381 Paralysed Hemidiaphragm and Shingles page 382 Exploring
the Red Cell page 383 Concealed Unnatural Death page 384 Leprosy in East Africa page 384

PAPERS AND ORIGINALS

- Nasal Cancer in the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe Industry**
E. D. ACHESON, R. H. COWDELL, AND B. JOLLES..... 385
- Additional Factors in Chronic Bronchitis** K. J. CULLEN, JANET ELDER, A. R. ADAMS, AND N. S. STENHOUSE..... 394
- Immunoglobulin Levels in the Cerebrospinal Fluid** D. RIDDOCH AND R. A. THOMPSON..... 396
- Metabolic Studies and Clinical Observations During L-Dopa Treatment of Parkinson's Disease**
M. J. T. PEASTON AND J. R. BIANCHINE..... 400
- Studies of Australia-SH Antigen in Sporadic Viral Hepatitis in London**
YVONNE E. COSSART AND J. VAHRMAN..... 403
- Serological Studies on Nephrotic Syndrome of Quartan Malaria in Uganda**
J. W. KIBUKAMUSOKE AND A. VOLLER..... 406
- Outbreak of Campbell de Morgan Spots** R. H. SEVILLE, P. S. RAO, D. N. HUTCHINSON, AND G. BIRCHALL..... 408

PRELIMINARY COMMUNICATIONS

- Renal Tubular Necrosis and Papillary Necrosis after Gastroenteritis in Infants**
A. R. CHRISPIN, D. HULL, AND J. G. LILLIE..... 410

MEDICAL MEMORANDA

- Post-vagotomy Diarrhoea?** R. H. FRANKLIN..... 412

MIDDLE ARTICLES

For Debate

- Impotence in Farm Workers using Toxic Chemicals**
MICHAEL L. E. ESPIR, J. W. HALL, J. G. SHIRREFFS,
AND DAVID L. STEVENS..... 423
- Unheard Voices**
The Consultant Physician..... 421
- Personal View** J. H. WALKER..... 426

BOOK REVIEWS..... 418

NEWS AND NOTES

- Epidemiology**..... 440
- Parliament**..... 441
- Medico-Legal**..... 442
- Medical News**..... 442

CURRENT PRACTICE

- Myopathy** P. K. THOMAS..... 413
- Today's Drugs**
Bronchodilators..... 415
- Any Questions?**..... 417

CORRESPONDENCE..... 427

OBITUARY NOTICES..... 437

SUPPLEMENT

- Organization Committee**..... 45
- Scottish G.M.S. Committee**..... 47
- Medical Preclinical Teachers' Pay**..... 48
- Association Notices**..... 50

Correspondence

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 500 words.

Complaints in the Hospital Service J. Brennan, M.D.; T. Denness, F.R.C.S.; and J. E. Duffield, D.P.M.	427	Mild Ulcerative Colitis A. K. Maitra, F.R.C.S.	431	Wigs and Waste Jane V. Bond, M.B.	434
Renal Transplantation E. W. L. Fletcher, F.F.R.	427	Thalassaemia Genes P. Wasi, M.D.	431	Proteins and Insulin Release J. Dupré, M.R.C.P., and D. J. Chisholm, M.R.A.C.P.	434
Phenformin and Stanozolol in Blood Fibrinolytic Activity I. S. Menon, M.B., PH.D. and others	428	Glue Ear P. W. R. M. Alberti, PH.D., F.R.C.S.(C.); J. Keohane, F.R.C.S.(C.); C. A. Holborow, F.R.C.S.	431	Culdocentesis in the Tropics S. D. T. Colbert, F.R.C.S.I.	435
Australia Antigen and Hepatitis F. O. MacCallum, F.R.C.PATH.	428	Treating Preinfected Wounds J. C. Mountain, F.R.C.S., and P. V. Seal, F.R.C.S.	431	Gaps in Medical Care J. J. A. Reid, M.D.	435
Bacteriuria in Infants G. D. Abbott, M.R.A.C.P.	428	Vagotomy for Peptic Ulcer A. G. Cox, F.R.C.S., and W. M. Cooke, F.R.C.S.	432	Proportional Representation J. M. W. Sedgwick, M.R.C.S.	435
Hospital Advisory Service W. W. Sargent, F.R.C.P.	428	Open Electrocardiograph Service D. S. Short, F.R.C.P.	433	General Practitioners and the District Hospitals H. C. H. Bird, M.B.; H. W. Fladé, M.B.	435
The Influenza Epidemic L. G. R. Hull, M.R.C.S.; M. B. Hay, M.B.; J. Stevenson, M.R.C.P.ED., and others; and K. T. Tchen, F.F.A.R.C.S.	429	Potassium Supplements B. E. C. Nordin, F.R.C.P., and R. Wilkinson, B.S.C.	433	Isolation of B.M.A. Divisions A. V. Russell, M.B.	435
Bacteria and Cadmium-treated Fabrics W. H. Hughes, F.R.C.PATH., and R. R. Davies	430	Leptospirosis L. H. Turner, M.D., D.T.M.&H., and A. F. Mohun, M.D., F.R.C.PATH.	433	Seniority Awards E. D. Sever, M.R.C.P.	436
Septic Shock C. J. Wright, F.R.C.S.; P. H. Fentem, M.B.	430	Syngomyelia B. N. Williams, F.R.C.S.	434	The Consultant Grade K. F. Standage, M.B.	436
				B.M.A. and Hospital Junior Staff R. Gibson, C.B.E., F.R.C.G.P.	436
				Unheard Voices E. A. Burkitt, D.P.M.	436

Complaints in the Hospital Service

SIR,—I have read in the *Daily Express*¹ a description of the Secretary's instruction to hospital authorities regarding complaints by patients and their relatives. In my opinion it is so ludicrous that one can only conclude that it must be wrongly reported. If it is indeed true then it must surely be the most irresponsible attack ever on the medical and nursing professions. It is in effect a "licence to litigate" since any serious complaint, if upheld by the hospital authority, will provide very strong grounds for a civil court action for damages. With our legal aid system no person bringing an action need risk the smallest financial loss. One can well imagine what advantage the unscrupulous and mischievous person will take of the official encouragement provided by the Secretary of State.

It is a most depressing situation, and I fear that job satisfaction will soon be a thing of the past for the profession. We shall be too busy dealing with complaints, or the possibility of them, to devote much time to our patients. If this should be the result of such public encouragement to the public not to trust their doctors and nurses then there will be a great acceleration in emigration and an equal reluctance of clever young people to come into medicine. Immigrant doctors, who have recently played such an important role in keeping the decaying hospital service going, will be very reluctant to practise in a country where the doctor is given the role of an Aunt Sally to be fired at by anyone so minded.—I am, etc.,

J. BRENNAN.

Bluebell Hill,
Kent.

REFERENCE

¹ *Daily Express*, 31 January 1970.

SIR,—I hope that the Association will soon be in a position to explain the terms of the Secretary of State's new scheme for facilitating complaints against hospitals and

hospital staffs. As I plough through vast fracture clinics at a rate which will allow me to begin the afternoon orthopaedic clinic in time, I really wonder whether it is worth the effort. It is obvious to anyone that one just has not got the time to give each patient that little bit of cheer which helps them to bear carrying a plaster around for many months. Any attempt at firmness is going to be construed as "bad manners" and probably reported as such.

Working under stress under 1935 facilities is no joke these days, and I feel that too little has been done in the past to bring this home to the great British public, who demand so much—without of course having to pay for it out of their own pockets. I have got to the stage now (at 57) of thinking seriously of cutting down clinics, although this at once raises a howl of anguish from our general practitioner colleagues. I am sure that there is no specialty more abused than that of orthopaedics. I must say that I now envy the comparative peace under which our other colleagues live: radiology, dermatology, and so forth.

Perhaps therefore in the near future someone would explain this new scheme to us.—I am, etc.,

T. DENNESS.

Ipswich.

SIR.—Instead of encouraging patients to complain about hospital staff, would the Secretary of State not be wiser to offer merit awards to hospitals? This would provide incentive to develop a team spirit and give staff a personal stake in efficiency—something which is at present sadly lacking.—I am, etc.,

J. E. DUFFIELD.

Radcliffe Infirmary,
Oxford.

Renal Transplantation

SIR.—I was interested to read of the removal of thrombus from the renal vein after renal transplantation by Mr. S. D. Clarke and others (17 January, p. 154). In their memorandum the authors mention that early diagnosis of renal vein thrombosis is important and I have found phlebography useful for this purpose.¹

During 1968 eight patients at the University of California, Los Angeles, had phlebograms to exclude renal vein thrombosis following transplantation. An iliac phlebogram was performed first to exclude thrombosis in the iliac veins. If no thrombosis was demonstrated a small polyethylene catheter was introduced into the vein of the transplanted kidney and selective renal phlebography was performed. Three of our patients had normal renal phlebograms and two patients had extremely good filling of the renal veins typical of rejection (confirmed by biopsy and arteriography). The other three patients had venous thrombosis. One patient had thrombosis of the ipsilateral common femoral and external iliac veins not involving the renal vein. The second patient had some thrombosis at the anastomosis of the renal vein to the common iliac vein, and the third patient had recanalization of a previously thrombosed common iliac vein and more recent thrombosis in small branches of the renal veins.

Phlebography proved helpful in the management of all these patients. The positive diagnosis of venous thrombosis in three patients resulted in their successful treatment with anticoagulants, and the other five patients were spared incorrect and potentially hazardous treatment. No complications of phlebography were encountered, and the techniques used were not difficult to perform.—I am, etc.,

E. W. L. FLETCHER.

Radiodiagnostic Department,
Radcliffe Infirmary,
Oxford.

REFERENCE

¹ Fletcher, E. W. L., Lecky, J. W., and Gonick, H. C., *Clinical Radiology* (in press).