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# BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL



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## Burnt Children

SIR,—I refer to your medico-legal item on this subject (22 March, p. 790). For every child who is burnt, or injured, or falls out of a window, or strays, or is assaulted in the absence of the parents, there must be literally thousands of cases in similar danger but whose parents are lucky enough to get away with it. As your correspondent points out, it is only when tragedy strikes that these cases come to light and it is then too late to impose a penalty.

This is a new feature of present-day parenthood. There have always been negligent parents who failed to take proper care of their children, but a generation ago the vast majority of mothers, if unable to make arrangements for the care of their children in their absence, either took their children with them or stayed at home. In either case the outcome may not have been what the parents wanted, but at least the children were safe and in parental care. The present day

practice of leaving small children alone and unsupervised while the parents go to bingo, cinema, pubs, etc., is now found in all social classes, and cases are frequently reported in the popular press of parents being threatened by an angry crowd after leaving a baby for hours in a closed car while they went in search of entertainment.

In my opinion severe penalties should be imposed on any parents who leave small children alone and unguarded whether or not they come to any harm. A few prosecutions in such cases would make indifferent parents realize their responsibilities in this direction. The courts are quick enough to prosecute persons who treat animals "in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering"—are children of tender years less important?—I am, etc.,

H. D. WILSON,  
County Medical Officer.  
County Health Department,  
Haddington, East Lothian.

## Pharmaceutical Society's Powers and the G.M.C.

SIR,—The significance of an unprecedented step recently taken by the council of the Pharmaceutical Society appears to have escaped the notice of our profession. The council of the Pharmaceutical Society recommend<sup>1</sup> that pharmacists should refuse to dispense amphetamine sulphate powder even though legally prescribed on a National Health Service form by a doctor. This deliberate breaking of a contract has been condoned by Mr. Crossman, who stated he welcomed the society's action.<sup>2</sup> Pharmacists have thus discretionary powers over the dispensing of a prescription signed by a registered medical practitioner.

This deliberate flaunting of a contract is to me wholly praiseworthy. The tragedy is why this step has had to be taken by pharmacists. That it has come about is entirely the fault

of our own profession and those responsible for ensuring and enforcing our standards of professional behaviour; that is the General Medical Council.

The General Medical Council must have been aware even before the publication of the second Brain Report in 1965<sup>3</sup> that a very small number of doctors were involved in the over-prescribing of heroin. Because the General Medical Council were either unable or unwilling to deal with these six doctors, the whole cumbersome machinery of altering the law had to be invoked and Parliament, despite great pressure of business, ultimately brought in the necessary legislation regarding heroin prescribing.

No doubt the defence of the General Medical Council would be that Parliament, despite vesting the council with powers to register

practitioners, has not granted wide enough powers to deal with those registered practitioners who in a particular way behave in a wholly unprofessional and irresponsible manner. If it were known in 1965 that some doctors were behaving in this way, surely by 1969 the G.M.C. should have sought and obtained the necessary powers to deal with wayward members of the profession such as those who now prescribe amphetamine sulphate powder clearly for use by addicts.

It is a very sorry reflection on the standing of the General Medical Council that action has had to be taken by the council of the Pharmaceutical Society, which is obviously neither impotent nor incompetent, to deal with certain members of our profession. That these discretionary powers of pharmacists over the dispensing of legal prescriptions also have vastly wider implications is beside the current point at issue.—I am, etc.,

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## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> *Pharmaceutical Journal*, 1969, 202, 257.
- <sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons, 17 March 1969, *Written Answer*, p. 12.
- <sup>3</sup> *Drug Addiction*, Second Report of the Inter-departmental Committee. 1965, London, H.M.S.O.

## Dosage Error

SIR,—My attention has just been drawn to a very grave error in dosage which appears in the 11th edition of the *Textbook of Medical Treatment* in the section on "Infectious Diseases" dealing with the treatment of pneumococcal meningitis by cephaloridine. The sentence appears on page 41 and reads: "The dose of cephaloridine for adults is 1 g. intramuscularly twice daily and 50 mg. per kg. of body weight intrathecally." The words "per kg. of body weight" should of course be deleted.