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BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL

SATURDAY 3 MAY 1975

LEADING ARTICLES

Drugs for Common Cancers page 235	Perinatal Research page 236	Sunscreens
page 237	Eradication of Smallpox page 237	HL-A Antigens and Rheumatic Diseases
page 238	Radiotherapy: Time and Fractions page 238	Ourselves as Others See Us
page 239	Acute Cholecystitis in Childhood page 239	

PAPERS AND ORIGINALS

Myocardial Infarction in Young Women with Special Reference to Oral Contraceptive Practice	
J. I. MANN, M. P. VESSEY, MARGARET THOROGOOD, SIR RICHARD DOLL	241
Oral Contraceptives and Death from Myocardial Infarction	J. I. MANN, W. H. W. INMAN
	245
Maintenance of Labour	J. M. BEAZLEY, I. BANOVIC, M. S. FELD
	248
Volunteer and Clinical Studies with Carfecillin: A New Orally Administered Ester of Carbenicillin	
P. J. WILKINSON, D. S. REEVES, R. WISE, J. T. ALLEN	250
Recovery from Goodpasture's Syndrome after Immunosuppressive Treatment and Plasmapheresis	
C. M. LOCKWOOD, J. M. BOULTON-JONES, R. M. LOWENTHAL, I. J. SIMPSON, D. K. PETERS, C. B. WILSON	252
Epigastric Pain in Duodenal Ulcer	J. B. DILAWARI, L. M. BLENDIS, D. A. W. EDWARDS
	254
Intranasal Beclomethasone Dipropionate in Allergic Rhinitis	J. MORRISON SMITH, R. T. CLEGG, N. COOK, A. G. BUTLER
	255
Generalized Pustular Psoriasis on Withdrawal of Clobetasol Propionate Ointment	
J. D. BOXLEY, R. P. R. DAWBER, R. SUMMERLY	255
Costing Cryoprecipitate for Haemophilia	FELICITY CARTER, J. MACFARLANE, C. D. FORBES, C. R. M. PRENTICE, J. WALLACE
	256

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MEDICAL PRACTICE

Psychological Medicine: Schizophrenia and Related Paranoid Psychoses	P. F. KENNEDY	257
Diagnosis of Hypothyroidism: A Comparison of Statistical Techniques	M. J. GARDNER, D. J. P. BARKER	260
Microcephaly Following Baby Battering and Shaking	J. E. OLIVER	262
Letter from Denmark: Too Much, Not Too Little?	FLEMMING FRØLUND	264
Reorganization of a Nutrition Unit in Papua New Guinea	ANNE BARNES	265
Conversations with Consultants: Miss Nightingale has Fled	FROM A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT	267
Aspirin and Coronary Heart Disease: Findings of a Prospective Study	E. CUYLER HAMMOND, LAWRENCE GARFINKEL	269
Any Questions?		272
Personal View	H. E. THOMAS	273

CORRESPONDENCE—List of Contents 274

NEWS AND NOTES

Epidemiology—Brucella melitensis	287
Medicolegal—Manslaughter Charges Against Doctors	287
Medical News—Medicines and Child Safety	288
B.M.A. Notices	289

OBITUARY NOTICES 282

BOOK REVIEWS 284

SUPPLEMENT

The Week	290
Joint Consultants' Committee	291
General Medical Services Committee	293

CORRESPONDENCE

Circulating Immune Complexes in Schistosomiasis Mary D. Smith, F.R.C.P.ED., and others.....274	Imported Sterile Water I. E. W. Gilmour, F.R.C.S.ED.....276	Warning from Saskatchewan D. R. Amies, F.R.C.S.ED.....279
Myasthenia Associated with Penicillamine Treatment D. A. H. Yates, M.D.....274	Dangers of Silent Gall Stones R. C. G. Russell, F.R.C.S., and H. A. F. Dudley, F.R.C.S.ED.....277	Training in Contraception J. D. O. Loudon, F.R.C.O.G.....279
Medicine on Television Marion C. Way, M.R.C.P.SYCH.....275	Merrison Report and Asian Doctors D. R. Prem, M.R.C.S.....277	Consultant Negotiations A. H. Grabham, F.R.C.S.; F. E. Weale, F.R.C.S.; M. Spiro, F.R.C.S.....279
Glomerulonephritis Associated with Coxiella burnetii Endocarditis G. H. Hall, F.R.C.P., and others.....275	Medical Problems of the North Sea I. K. Anderson, M.R.C.G.P.....277	New Contract for Junior Hospital Staff B. F. Boyce, M.B., and others.....280
Convulsion following Maprotiline Overdose D. R. Meek, M.B., and others.....275	Tailored Treatment for Varicose Veins I. G. Schraibman, F.R.C.S.....277	After the Review Body Award J. C. Nicholson, M.R.C.G.P.....280
Anaemia in Pregnancy D. J. Thomas, F.R.C.S.ED.....275	Ischaemic Heart Disease and Pernicious Anaemia D. G. French, F.R.C.G.P.....278	Fees for Insurance Reports A. George, M.B.....281
Misleading Drug Advertising B. N. C. Prichard, M.R.C.P.....275	Working of the Abortion Act P. J. Huntingford, F.R.C.O.G.....278	Gold Therapy in 1975 Rt. Hon. Lord Platt, F.R.C.P.....281
An Easy Death S. L. H. Smith, M.R.C.G.P.; O. G. Morgan, F.R.C.S.....276	Debrisoquine, Guanethidine, and Bethanidine in Hypertension S. Talbot, M.R.C.P., and others.....278	Points from Letters Additional Sessions for Consultants (J. B. Fawcitt); Rats Today (J. G. Wilson; T. J. B. Dawes); Speech Therapy for the Mentally Handicapped (Carol Miller); Treatment of Alcoholism (L. M. Shirlaw); Registrable Qualifications (N. Marsden); Extravagant Investigation (A. A. Stephen); Kilo-pascals (A. Hollman); Treatment of Sciatica (J. H. Davidson).....281
Sand Pneumoconiosis in an Egyptian Mummy E. Tapp, M.D., and others.....276	Availability of Glycerol Trinitrate S. V. Steinberg, M.B.....278	
	Paramenstrual Baby Battering Katharina D. Dalton, M.R.C.G.P.....279	

Correspondents are urged to write briefly so that readers may be offered as wide a selection of letters as possible. So many are now being received that the omission of some is inevitable. Letters should be signed personally by all their authors.

Circulating Immune Complexes in Schistosomiasis

SIR,—We read with interest the report by Drs. M. A. Madwar and A. Voller (22 February, p. 435) of the demonstration of circulating soluble antigens and antibody in schistosomiasis and the authors' suggestion that their demonstration strongly supports the association of soluble immune complexes in the aetiology of the disease. To date, however, the demonstration of circulating immune complexes has been difficult, mainly owing to the lack of sensitive methods for their detection. Immune complexes demonstrated by the inhibition of complement-dependent lymphocyte rosette formation have been shown to be present in, for example, Crohn's disease¹ and steroid-sensitive nephrotic syndrome.² The demonstration in this way of immune complexes in diseases where by other methods the results have proved negative indicates that this technique is very sensitive.

We have applied this technique and another method available for the detection of immune complexes, precipitation by radiolabelled C1q and polyethylene glyco,³ to the serum of 21 patients with schistosomiasis, either *Schistosoma haematobium* or *S. mansoni*, and nine patients with schistosomiasis and malaria. Control subjects consisted of 15 Africans in whom investigations for parasitic diseases were negative. A value of inhibition over 30%—that is, twice the mean value obtained for the control African sera—was considered to be indicative of the presence of immune complexes. Thirteen of the 21 patients with *S. mansoni* or *S. haematobium* infections and four of the nine with malaria and schistosomiasis had values over 30%. The presence of an active infection—that is, the demonstration of viable eggs in the urine or faeces—appeared to correlate positively with the demonstration of immune complexes. Precipitation by C1q

and polyethylene glycol gave positive results in only one serum.

These preliminary results suggest that circulating immune complexes are present in the serum of some patients with schistosomiasis. The application of the rosette inhibition test for detecting immune complexes in the serum of patients with tropical diseases is being further studied.—We are,

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¹ Ezer, G., and Hayward, A. R., *European Journal of Immunology*, 1974, 4, 148.

² Smith, M. D., et al., *Clinical and Experimental Immunology*. In press.

³ Nydegger, U., et al., *Schweizerische medizinische Wochenschrift*, 1974, 104, 126.

Myasthenia Associated with Penicillamine Treatment

SIR,—The four cases of reversible muscle weakness associated with penicillamine described by Dr. R. C. Bucknall and his colleagues (15 March, p. 600) are of great interest. However, on the data given there is insufficient justification to apply the title of myasthenia gravis to the syndrome, however suggestive the clinical picture may have been. Though myasthenia gravis has not yet been given a totally satisfactory definition, there are electrophysiological characteristics by which it can be distinguished from other forms of muscular weakness which show a

positive response to cholinesterase inhibitors, such as metabolic myopathy, polymyositis, and even motor neurone disease. In true myasthenia gravis the electromyogram (E.M.G.) should show specific abnormalities to enable the diagnosis to be made, and these tests could include the response to prolonged tetanization at different rates, the sensitivity to decamethonium, single-fibre studies of jitter and blocking,¹ and the quantity and size of miniature end-plate potentials.² The fact that only two of the four patients are stated to have had an E.M.G. performed and that in these it was "normal" is unsatisfactory. Either the tests used were not sensitive enough or the patients were receiving cholinesterase inhibitors at the time, in which case the tests should be repeated after withdrawal.

The implication in the discussion that the myasthenic state in these patients may be akin to other forms of antibiotic-induced neuromuscular blockade is confusing. The electrophysiological findings reported with weakness after neomycin treatment are similar to those in the myasthenic syndrome³ and distinct from those in myasthenia gravis. This distinction is of more than academic interest, since the weakness of the myasthenic syndrome can be successfully treated with guanidine.

These cases are of great interest, but to avoid confusion the condition would be better described as a toxic myasthenia associated with penicillamine. Further cases will undoubtedly be encountered and further electrophysiological studies will be necessary.—I am, etc.,

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¹ Stålberg, E., and Ekstedt, J., in *New Developments in Electromyography and Clinical Neurophysiology*, ed. J. E. Desmedt, vol. 1, p. 113. Basel, Karger, 1973.

² Elmquist, D., in *New Developments in Electromyography and Clinical Neurophysiology*, ed. J. E. Desmedt, vol. 1, p. 229. Basel, Karger, 1973.

³ Lambert, E. H., and Elmquist, D., *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1971, 183, 183.