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SATURDAY 2 MAY 1981

LEADING ARTICLES

Mitral valve prolapse	1411	Death of a Quango	1413
Understanding hepatic regeneration	1412	Painful iceberg	1414
Patient participation: more pipedream than practice?	1413	Prognosis of Crohn's disease	1415
		Thomas Lewis and clinical research	1416

CLINICAL RESEARCH • PAPERS AND SHORT REPORTS • PRACTICE OBSERVED

Regular Review: New uncertainties in prenatal screening for neural tube defect	RODNEY HARRIS, A P READ	1416
Corticosteroid resistance in chronic asthma	J CARMICHAEL, I C PATERSON, P DIAZ, G K CROMPTON, A B KAY, I W B GRANT	1419
Treatment of chronic heart failure with pirbuterol: acute haemodynamic responses	J R DAWSON, R CANEPA-ANSON, P KUAN, N H G WHITAKER, J CARNIE, C WARNES, S R REUBEN, P A POOLE-WILSON, G C SUTTON	1423
Multimodal treatment in operable breast cancer: five-year results of the CMF programme	ANNA ROSSI, GIANNI BONADONNA, PINUCCIA VALAGUSSA, UMBERTO VERONESI	1427
Intramuscular cimetidine is safe and acceptable	S L GRAINGER, R E POUNDER, R P H THOMPSON	1431
Familial colorectal cancer and hereditary brachydactyly	F A MACRAE, I C ROBERTS-THOMSON, D MCR RUSSELL, D J B ST JOHN	1431
Synergistic action of metolazone with "loop" diuretics	R R GHOSE, S K GUPTA	1432
Association between Stevens-Johnson syndrome and benoxaprofen	AILEEN E M TAYLOR, DAVID GOFF, T COLIN HINDSON	1433
Failure of ejaculation with indoramin	BRIAN PENTLAND, DOROTHY A ANDERSON, JULIAN A J H CRITCHLEY	1433
Scombrototoxic atrial flutter	LESZEK BORYSIEWICZ, DENNIS KRIKLER	1434
Sex Problems in Practice: Vaginismus	ELIZABETH STANLEY	1435
Medical Records: VI—Middle-sized group practice	PETER TOMSON	1438
A night at the opera: RSM meeting on delivering primary care in inner cities	SUE BURKHART	1441

MEDICAL PRACTICE

Compensation for Drug Injury: Problems both sides of the Atlantic	RICHARD SMITH	1443
Two decades of change: Glenside Hospital population surveys 1960-80	DONAL F EARLY, MICHAEL NICHOLAS	1446
Cancer and communication: information-giving in an oncology clinic	PATRICIA M REYNOLDS, R W SANSON-FISHER, A DESMOND POOLE, JENNIFER HARKER, MICHAEL J BYRNE	1449
Ultrasound of the gall bladder: experience in a district hospital	T M WALKER	1452
Broaden your mind, narrow your chances? Reflections on short-term medical work in the developing world	J A FAIRCLOUGH, S A SPENCER	1454
Letter from Chicago: Compulsion	GEORGE DUNEA	1456
Musings of a Dean: Teaching and service	1458
Dealing with the Disadvantaged: Huntington's chorea—a family problem	ROSEMARY YALE	1460
Any Questions?	1445, 1451, 1453, 1455
Materia Non Medica—Contributions from	SUSANNE T CHAPMAN, MARGARET BONIFACE, NICHOLAS GONI, HENRY S FRASER	1459, 1461
Medicine and Books	1462
Personal View	F A W SCHWEITZER	1467

CORRESPONDENCE—List of Contents	1468
---------------------------------------	------

OBITUARY	1481
----------------	------

NEWS AND NOTES

Views	1483
Epidemiology—Campylobacter infections, 1977-80	1484
Parliament	1484
Medical News	1485
BMA Notices—Medical Advisers in the Pharmaceutical Industry Group	1486

SUPPLEMENT

The Week	1487
Letter from Westminster WILLIAM RUSSELL	1488
From the HJSC	1489
New hospital complaints procedure	1491
From the GMSC: Medical certification	1492
BMA Fees Guide	1494
Corrections: Annual Report of Council; From the JCC ...	1494

CORRESPONDENCE

Inequalities in health Sir Douglas Black, PRCP	1468	Depression of cellular immunity as an index of malnutrition in surgical patients G B Brookes, FRCS; J A R Smith, FRCS; Sylvia M Watkins, FRCP; D M A Francis, FRCS, and B K Shenton, PhD; K S Nair, MRCP, and J S Garrow, FRCP	1473	Nuclear weapons proliferation, medicine's supreme challenge M J Hall, MRCP	1477
Orthopaedic waiting lists J C Griffiths, FRCS	1468	Meditation in general practice P Joan Bishop, MB	1474	Health services research A L Pahor, FRCS	1477
Overseas doctors S P Sashidharan, MRCPsych; V D Patil, MB; D R Harvey, FRCP	1469	Tea consumption: a cause of constipation I M Baird, FRCP, and E R Littlewood, MRCP	1474	Medical education, manpower, and unemployment Rosalie Silverstone, PhD, and M R Salkind, FRCP	1478
Hazards of unemployment A J R Scott-Samuel, MFCM	1470	Levodopa: long-term impact on Parkinson's disease A Nasar, MRCP; J D Carroll, FRCP	1475	Medical education in London S A Feldman, FFARCS	1478
Detecting hypertensive patients P G F Nixon, MRCP	1470	Controlled trial of physiotherapy and occupational therapy for Parkinson's disease K Andrews, MRCP	1475	Organisation and management of scientific services in Scotland R A Bird	1478
Treatment of mild and moderate hypertension P L Drury, MRCP	1470	Small maternity units E B M Harding, SCM, and others	1475	The non-honorary senior registrar Jacky S Chambers, MB	1478
General practice compliance study P I Vardy, MRCP; D D Cowen, MRCP ..	1470	Perinatal death recording Maureen J Scott, MD	1475	Difficulties caused by too few senior staff A C Townsend, FRCS	1479
Mefenamic acid nephropathy K L Woods, MD, and J Michael, MRCP ..	1471	Late appearance of pneumothorax after subclavian vein catheterisation: an anaesthetic hazard A J Carter, FFARCS	1476	Recompense for GMSC members G F E Edmondson-Jones, MRCP	1479
Adverse reactions to drugs J R Coope, MRCP	1471	Oral progesterone M I Whitehead, MRCP, and others	1476	Witchcraft accusations today J A M Gray, MD	1479
Aspirin and the stomach R W D Turner, FRCP	1471	Treatment of vasospastic disease with prostaglandin E₁ A J M Cleophas, MD, and others	1476	Points Nappy rashes (B M Guyer); A quaint, obnoxious word? (M G Selson); Passing a nasogastric tube (J Meyrick Thomas); Lipoatrophy and monocomponent porcine insulin (V A Fonseca); Fluid absorption during transurethral resection (D A Kelly, and B A Taylor); Poliomyelitis worldwide (S C Arya); Does cimetidine cause gastric cancer? (D A Jennings); Children born as a result of incest (A H Bittles)	1480
After gastrectomy G T Lewith, MRCP, and F J Davidson, FRCP; A H M Ross, FRCS, and others ...	1471	Do fetal movements reflect fetal wellbeing? E Sadovsky, MD	1476	Correction: Treatment with theophylline and beta₂-adrenoceptor-stimulating agents (Campbell)	1480
Long survival in acute myelogenous leukaemia N P Lucie, MRCP, and others	1472	Drug prevention of malaria J Haworth, MFCM	1477		
Age of mothers with breast cancer and sex of their children N Mantel	1472				
"A Whole New Medicine" J O Drife, MRCP	1473				

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Correspondents should present their references in the Vancouver style (see examples in these columns). In particular, the names and initials of all authors must be given unless there are more than six, when only the first three should be given, followed by et al; and the first and last page numbers of articles and chapters should be included. Titles of papers are not, however, included in the correspondence section.

Inequalities in health

SIR,—In a release from the Conservative Central Office, the Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin is reported as having stated, on the basis of "a whole lot more evidence," that "people with lower incomes, more of whom are likely to be elderly, tend to receive proportionately more services than the average for the population as a whole." This statement is formally correct, and indeed the evidence for it is quite clearly set out in Chapter 4 of the report *Inequalities in Health*.¹ Nevertheless, it is misleading in two important respects, also stated in the report. When use of the services is related to indices of need, the apparent greater utilisation disappears. More important, there is good evidence that preventive services are differentially underused by those with lower incomes. This particularly applies to the services available for mothers and children.

In the same speech, Mr Jenkin criticised the report for failure to "explain the fundamental causes of why some people, some

groups, some regions, seem to suffer much worse health than others." While it would be presumptuous to claim success, chapter 6 (pp 153-98) at least shows that we tried. The problem is admittedly complex, but we do give solid reasons for attributing persisting inequalities in health in the main to the very structure of our society. We too would have liked to find a cheap and easy solution to the problem which we were asked to consider. Complete abolition of inequalities in health would indeed be costly and would take time; but that is no reason for not making a start in the right direction—and, of course, the majority of our recommendations could be implemented at low cost.

These matters have been discussed with my colleagues in the working party. I would like to add a further point, with which I believe they would agree, but it has not been formally discussed with them. The material in our report has been interpreted as evidence of "failure of the NHS." This ignores the

general improvement in the health of the nation which has occurred since the NHS began. This is only in part attributable to the NHS itself, and grave social inequalities persist; but the NHS has certainly not "failed," and it is the responsibility of the nation as a whole to improve it further.

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Inequalities in Health

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¹ Research Working Group on Inequalities in Health. *Inequalities in health*. London: Department of Health and Social Security, 1980. (Black Report.)

Orthopaedic waiting lists

SIR,—A brief synopsis of the recent DHSS report on orthopaedic services appeared in *Medical News* (21 March, p 1001). The flavour of the report cannot truly be savoured