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PROCUREMENT SECTION  
CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

## LEADING ARTICLES

- For Further Debate page 129      Hypoglycaemia in Infancy and Childhood page 130  
Contraception and Blood Pressure page 130      Humane Care page 131      Cultivation of Osler's  
Nodes page 132      Haemorrhagic Ulceration of Gut page 132      Doctors and the Common  
Market page 133      Freedom from Amphetamines page 133      New Test for Cancer page 134

## PAPERS AND ORIGINALS

- Study of Renal Function in the Differential Diagnosis of Kidney Disease    JAN BROD. .... 135  
Results of Double-blind, Multicentre Study with Ritodrine in Premature Labour  
A. WESSELIUS-DE CASPARIS, M. THIERY, A. YO LE SIAN, K. BAUMGARTEN, I. BROSENS, O. GAMISANS, J. G. STOLK, W. VIVIER. .... 144  
Problems in the Early Recognition of Congenital Hip Dislocation    GEOFFREY WALKER. .... 147  
Relation between Aspects of Nutritional Disturbance and Menstrual Activity in Primary Anorexia Nervosa  
A. H. CRISP, EDWARD STONEHILL. .... 149  
Comparison of Adrenergic Beta-blocking Drugs in Angina Pectoris  
B. SHARMA, M. K. MEERAN, M. C. GALVIN, A. T. TULPUL, W. WHITAKER, S. H. TAYLOR ..... 152  
In-vitro Inhibition of Leucocyte Migration in Crohn's Disease by a Sarcoid Spleen Suspension  
J. M. T. WILLOUGHBY, D. N. MITCHELL. .... 155  
Mechanisms for Eosinophilic and Neutrophilic Leucocytoses    R. S. WALLS, A. BASTEN, E. LEUCHARS, A. J. S. DAVIES. .... 157  
Trimethoprim-sulphamethoxazole in Acute Brucellosis    A. HASSAN, M. M. ERIAN, Z. FARID, S. D. HATHOUT, K. SORENSEN. .... 159  
Control of Aortic Haemorrhage by Balloon Catheter    E. R. HOWARD, A. E. YOUNG. .... 161  
Anaphylactic Reaction to Chlorpropamide    M. RAVID, E. RUBINSTEIN, S. CABILI. .... 162

## MEDICAL PRACTICE

- Routine Smallpox Vaccination    GEORGE DICK. .... 163  
Morale and the Planning of Psychogeriatric Services    THOMAS ARIE. .... 166  
Effects of Industrial Action by the Ambulance Service on Day Hospital Patients    D. M. PRINSLEY. .... 170  
Hunterian Pilgrimage    R. S. MURLEY ..... 172  
Vocational Training V—Livingston ..... 173  
Today's Drugs: Antileprosy Drugs. .... 174  
Freedom from Amphetamines ..... 176  
Any Questions? ..... 178  
Personal View    SEBASTIAN KRAEMER. .... 179

CORRESPONDENCE ..... 180

BOOK REVIEWS ..... 195

### NEWS AND NOTES

- Epidemiology—Brucellosis ..... 197  
Parliament—Accidental Poisoning and Road Accidents .. 197  
Medical News ..... 199

OBITUARY NOTICES ..... 192

### SUPPLEMENT

- Public Health Committee ..... 31  
Annual Representative Meeting 1971: Supplementary  
Agenda ..... 31  
Association Notices ..... 32

# CORRESPONDENCE

*Correspondents are asked to be brief*

## Training Surgeons

J. B. Laine, F.R.C.S.; J. M. Potter, F.R.C.S. . . . 180

## Adverse Reactions to Oral Antidiabetic Agents

J. K. Wales, M.D. . . . 181

## The Ward Sister

S. O. Aylett, F.R.C.S.; Anne Miller, S.R.N.; L. Kessel, F.R.C.S. . . . 181

## "Lunchtime Abortions"

Sir Norman Jeffcoate, F.R.C.O.G., and Sir George Godber, G.C.B., F.R.C.P. . . . 181

## Rifampicin Jaundice

J. R. T. Gabriel, M.Sc., M.R.C.P. . . . 182

## Cyclophosphamide and the Bladder

P. H. L. Worth, F.R.C.S. . . . 182

## Viper Bites

H. A. Reid, F.R.C.P. . . . 182

## Health Centre Design—A Criticism

J. J. Brennan, L.R.C.P.I. . . . 182

## Glove Powder

D. F. E. Nash, F.R.C.S. . . . 183

## Ileus and Pseudo-obstruction

J. Neely, F.R.C.S. . . . 183

## Jejunal Diverticula

W. M. Keynes, F.R.C.S. . . . 183

## Haemorrhage Mimicking Intravascular Haemolysis

Kathleen M. Harrison, M.R.C.PATH., and others . . . 183

## Gaps in Venereology

F. M. Lanigan-O'Keeffe, M.D., and W. Fowler, M.D. . . . 184

## Sterilization of Young Wives

R. J. Houseman, M.B. . . . 184

## Malathion Poisoning

J. P. W. Hughes, M.D. . . . 184

## Survival in Severe Congenital Heart Disease

I. M. Anderson, F.R.C.P. . . . 184

## Breach of Confidentiality

C. May Duddle, D.P.M. . . . 184

## Accident and Emergency Services

C. S. Flowers, M.B. . . . 185

## Organization and Staffing of Operating Theatres

P. W. Lord, F.F.A. R.C.S., and W. N. Vellacott, F.F.A. R.C.S. . . . 185

## Drug Licensing

Janet A. Hauff . . . 185

## Cerebral Vasodilators

C. G. Elliott, B.M. . . . 185

## Treatment of Myasthenia

M. J. Lange, F.R.C.S. . . . 186

## Unnecessary X-rays

A. W. Fowler, F.R.C.S. . . . 186

## Thalidomide

R. Bell, M.B. . . . 186

## The Forgotten—an Occupational Centre

Elizabeth Grove . . . 186

## Migraine Research

F. W. Law, F.R.C.S.; R. C. Gledhill, M.D., D.P.M. . . . 186

## Medical Presentations of Choriocarcinoma

N. G. Mussalli, M.R.C.O.G. . . . 187

## Hydatidiform Mole and Hyperthyroidism

A. Robson, M.B. . . . 187

## Encouraging Recruits to Medicine

R. Westcott, B.A. . . . 187

## Radiological Training

J. H. Middlemiss, M.D., F.F.R. . . . 187

## Size of Medical Records

J. K. Hawkey, B.M., and others . . . 188

## Wellington and the Placebo

D. E. Wallis, M.B. . . . 188

## Royal College of Psychiatrists

A. Shapiro, M.D., D.P.M.; J. P. Crawford, M.D., D.P.M.; J. A. Whitehead, D.P.M. . . . 188

## Medical, Dental, and Nursing Services for the Armed Forces

R. M. Gibson, F.R.C.S. . . . 189

## Socrates Can Sleep in Peace

C. De F. W. Goonaratna, M.B. . . . 189

## Work Overseas after Retirement

H. M. Woodman, M.D. . . . 189

## Jaundice after Anaesthesia

B. R. J. Simpson, F.F.A. R.C.S. . . . 189

## General Practitioners and the B.M.A.

S. Wand, M.B., D.C.L.; D. V. Cashman, M.B. . . . 189

## Consultative Document

N. F. Coghill, F.R.C.P., and J. S. Stewart, M.R.C.P.; W. Fine, F.R.C.P. . . . 190

## Hospital Staff Appointments

I. Lewis, F.R.C.S.; J. A. Loeb, F.R.C.S. . . . 190

## Training Surgeons

SIR,—With reference to the leading article "Training Surgeons" (5 June, p. 543) I am writing to express my anxiety over the apparent lack of concern which the British Medical Association is showing towards its members who are hospital senior staff. You state in the penultimate paragraph, "Further progress cannot be made unless the number of registrar training posts is substantially reduced" and, further, you go on to say "it is also vital that a realistic career structure should be devised if the present anxieties of the hospital junior staff are to be allayed."

I rejoined the B.M.A. last year after considerable thought as I believed that the Association had the interests of *all* medical staff at heart. However, it is becoming clear that this may not be so, and I am sure that there must be many consultants who have serious doubts about their ability to maintain an already tottering service if the supporting staff are to be reduced in the manner implied in your article. I am not sure whether it is the intention of the Association to support a large scale increase in consultant staff with a consequent reduction in the status of the hospital consultant, or whether the Association is concerned to maintain standards. I think it should be realized that if the consultant establishment is expanded without any thought being given to the training and service commitments of regional consultants then we will find ourselves in a position where the status of the hospital consultant has been so diminished that the post becomes unattractive to junior staff. I believe

that the consultant establishment needs to be expanded and in some cases we are desperately trying to increase this, but owing to lack of funds, personnel, or other reasons success is impossible to achieve.

I know that there are senior surgical registrars who are deeply concerned about the possibility of obtaining a consultant position without adequate supporting help, and again I say, unless we are very careful the consultant position will become so unattractive that our juniors will find that hard work is indeed not its own reward, but merely a guarantee of more hard work, more responsibility, and less reward, and by that I mean not only financial but something which tends to be overlooked today, and that is job satisfaction.—I am, etc.,

JOHN LAINE

Maclor General Hospital,  
Wrexham

SIR,—As you say in your leading article (5 June, p. 543) "these proposals are inextricably linked with those of coping with the work load and the service commitment to patients." But nowhere in the second report of the Joint Committee on Higher Surgical Training<sup>1</sup> is there mention of this commitment, which is after all what surgery is all about and what training is for. It seems that the committee is content for training posts to be approved first, and then for the staffing problems of departments without designated posts to be sorted out later. In-

deed, it is not the committee's function to be concerned with staffing. But someone must be.

The Society of British Neurological Surgeons is one of the specialist societies which, while welcoming the proposals for enrolment and for subsequent certification of trainees, has not yet reached agreement with the joint committee. It is feared that the proposals for the designation of training posts may seriously affect the staffing prospects of some neurosurgical departments which are at present providing a much needed service and at which valuable, if not comprehensive, training experience may be obtained.

The society believes, too, that many difficulties, including those of the registrar problem, would be eased if special training posts, guaranteed for, say, three years, were to be made available to those overseas surgeons who intend to return to their own countries. The need for these is urgent, and it is important that they should be rotating posts in order to provide the best possible training.

It is, of course, hoped that the new training scheme will lead eventually to improved patient care; but this cannot yet be certain, and our society believes that the present needs of patients should not be neglected during what may prove to be a prolonged period of trial. Some see a warning in what has happened to nursing.

The royal colleges and the Association of Professors of Surgery are properly concerned with training. The specialist societies have the added responsibility to be sure that the hard-won existing services to patients are