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LEADING ARTICLES

- Operations for Obesity page 247 Prenatal Diagnosis page 248 Health Departments Galore
page 249 Mental Hospital Revolution page 249 Cot Deaths page 250 Vitamin E in
Athletics page 251 "The Loose Back" page 251 Pupillary Mobility and Skin Colour
page 252 British Society of Digestive Endoscopy page 252

PAPERS AND ORIGINALS

- Prognostic Typing in Breast Cancer F. HARTVEIT..... 253
Recurrent Thyrotoxicosis after Subtotal Thyroidectomy
ANTHONY J. HEDLEY, IAIN P. ROSS, J. SWANSON BECK, DAVID DONALD, F. ALBERT-RECHT, W. MICHIE, JAMES CROOKS..... 258
Phenylalanine Absorption and Metabolism in Parkinsonian Patients
ANN-KATHRINE GRANERUS, RUDOLF JAGENBURG, STIG RÖDJER, ALVAR SVANBORG..... 262
Clinical and Electroencephalographic Assessment of Diazepam in Liver Disease
IAIN M. MURRAY-LYON, JANET YOUNG, J. D. PARKES, R. P. KNILL-JONES, ROGER WILLIAMS..... 265
Use of Metolazone in the Treatment of Ascites due to Liver Disease P. HILLENBRAND, SHEILA SHERLOCK..... 266
Some Operative and Postoperative Hazards of Legal Termination of Pregnancy SATYA V. SOOD..... 270
Aluminium in Bone from Patients with Renal Failure
VICTOR PARSONS, CHRISTINE DAVIES, CLIFFORD GOODE, CHISHOLM OGG, J. SIDDIQUI..... 273
Thyrotoxicosis Developing during Cyclophosphamide Therapy I. R. MCDougALL, W. R. GREIG, H. W. GRAY, J. F. B. SMITH.... 275

MEDICAL PRACTICE

- Factors Influencing Return to Work D. A. BREWERTON, J. W. DANIEL..... 277
Geriatric Patients: Do Their Families Care? BERNARD ISAACS..... 282
Problems of the Newborn—Some Congenital Malformations Necessitating Emergency Operations in the Newborn
Period P. P. RICKHAM..... 286
Organizing a Medical Congress PHILIP H. N. WOOD..... 290
New Appliances—Dry Method for Estimation of Mixed Venous CO₂ Concentration..... 292
Any Questions?..... 294
Personal View CLAIRE THOMSON..... 295

CORRESPONDENCE—List of Contents..... 296

BOOK REVIEWS..... 308

NEWS AND NOTES

- Epidemiology—Coxsackie B2 Virus..... 310
Parliament—Lords Debate Whitley Machinery..... 310
Medicolegal—Medical Students in Casualty Departments.. 311
Medical News..... 312

OBITUARY NOTICES..... 306

SUPPLEMENT

- General Medical Services Committee..... 17
In Brief..... 19
From the Committees..... 20
Association Notices..... 22

CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondents are asked to be brief

Pregnancy Testing F. W. Winton, M.B. 296	Antileprosy Drugs A. S. Garrett, M.B. 300	Vasodilators in Menière's Syndrome N. M. Piercy, M.B. 303
Listeriosis W. Kwantes, F.R.C.PATH., and M. Isaac, F.I.M.L.T. 296	Blood Flow in Ischaemic Feet A. J. McEwan, F.R.C.S., and I. McA. Leding- ham, M.B. 300	Destruction of Case Records J. H. Mitchell, M.D. 303
Reversible Sterilization in the Female E. A. Williams, F.R.C.O.G. 297	Predicting Fetal Maturity O. A. N. Husain, M.D., and L. Sinclair, M.R.C.P. 300	Community Medicine M. Macleod, M.B.; M. J. McCarthy, M.R.C.P. 303
Solar Flares and the Concorde E. E. Pochin, F.R.C.P. 297	Fingerprint Changes in Dermatitis Herpetiformis J. L. Verbov, M.D., and others. 300	Medical Illustrators L. Bowcock, M.B. 303
Alcohol and Glibenclamide M. J. Fairman, M.B., and H.-J. B. Galbraith, F.R.C.P. 297	Uterine Hypotonia R. N. Spencer-Gregson, M.R.C.O.G. 301	Staffing Accident and Emergency Depart- ments R. I. Mackay, M.R.C.P., and J. B. Duckworth, F.C.I.S. 303
Amniotic Cell Culture A. D. Hoyes, PH.D., M.B. 297	Mental Deficiency Nursing D. A. Spencer, D.P.M. 301	Shortage of Physiotherapists D. C. Shields, M.B. 304
Obesity and Smoking Habits G. Pincherle, M.R.C.P. 298	Agranulocytosis Associated with Trim- ethoprim-sulphamethoxazole I. P. Palva, M.D., and O. Koivisto, M.D. 301	Evidence to the Coroner G. M. Francis. 304
Intravenous Practolol S. J. Jachuck, M.B., and M. H. Husaini, M.R.C.P. 298	Chromosome Breakage and Ultrasound T. G. Davis, M.D. 301	Hallucinations of Widowhood W. B. Roantree, F.R.C.S.ED. 304
Epitaph for the M.C.H.C. F. Nour-Eldin, PH.D., M.R.C.PATH. 298	Persistent Phenothiazine Dyskinesia and Tetrabenazine R. C. Hughes, M.R.C.P. 302	Hypoglycaemia in Infancy and Child- hood J. C. Haworth, M.D. 304
Cholangiogram Cannula-introducing Forceps J. McKenzie Buchanan, F.R.C.S. 298	Air Embolism during Haemodialysis T. Lindholm, M.D., L.-A. Larsson, M.D. 302	Cameron Fund B. Holden, F.R.C.S.ED. 305
Normal Range for Serum Transaminases J. King and others. 299	Misadventure J. Peel, B.A. 302	National Hospital Staffs Conference F. J. Bramble, F.R.C.S. 305
Lymph Nodes and Gastric Cancer E. G. Cantrell, M.D. 299	Screening of Elderly Patients G. C. Rivett, B.M., and others. 302	Consultants' Contracts J. J. Shipman, F.R.C.S. 305
		Pensions and the Abatement Rule V. Purvis, D.O.M.S. 305

Pregnancy Testing

SIR,—As one of many hospital bacteriologists responsible for providing a pregnancy diagnosis service I fully endorse the view expressed by Mr. A. D. Thursz (25 September, p. 769). Indeed I am encouraged to note that a consultant obstetrician has ventured to raise this controversial matter.

I have for some time considered that it is not the place of the hospital laboratory to carry out routine tests merely to determine whether a normal state of pregnancy exists—solely for "social" reasons. We are all aware what these reasons are: for example, indiscreet behaviour by a young patient, or to know whether a state of pregnancy exists which may interfere with booked holidays abroad, etc. If the general practitioner is to be asked by his patient to request a test in these circumstances then either the test should be performed in the surgery with suitable reimbursement to the doctor, or the patient herself should meet the cost of the test done in a private laboratory specializing in this examination.

On the other hand no-one would suggest that pregnancy diagnosis tests are not totally valid in cases of threatened abortion, missed abortion, hydatidiform mole, ectopic pregnancy, testicular teratoma, and other pathological conditions where it is required to know the level of urinary H.C.G. excretion.

This laboratory carried out 4,840 tests during the last 12 months and have analysed 228 pregnancy diagnosis tests performed during the period 3 to 21 September—a total of 15 working days. One hundred and sixty-three (71.5%) of this total were for apparently social reasons and 65 (28.5%)

were for medically acceptable diagnostic purposes. Further analysis of this latter group shows that 25 out of the 65 examinations were requested by hospital specialist obstetric or surgical staff. Thus 203 out of 228 requests arose from general practice interviews of which only 40 (19.7%) were for justifiable patient-care reasons. This percentage does not warrant routine hospital laboratory examination constituting considerable wastage in terms of technicians' time and cost of materials—11.4% of our total budget for bacteriology. Microbiology units have plenty of other examinations that should be carried out were it not for time spent in the performance of these pregnancy tests, and I might add that the handling of some 40 telephone requests weekly for the results of these tests disrupts both the office staff and technical staff in the continuity of their duties.—I am, etc.,

F. W. WINTON

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Listeriosis

SIR,—Dr. D. M. O. Becroft and others (25 September, p. 747) suggested that the cause of their epidemic was either a common source of infection or a coincidental incidence of inapparent infections in the community. It is not generally realized that *Listeria monocytogenes* is often found in the faeces of man and animals.^{1,2}

For a period of 18 months, using a modi-

fication of the method described by Kampelmacher,² we have investigated the presence of *L. monocytogenes* in the faeces of humans and have isolated this organism from 32 of 5,000 faeces, an incidence of 0.6%. Follow up suggested that carriage was transient, an observation already made by Bojsen-Møller.³ There have been no diagnosed cases of listeria meningitis or listeriosis of the newborn in Swansea over the past 15 years and the presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in faeces is more likely to be a transient carriage than inapparent infection in the community.

In search for a possible source of this transient carriage, it has been found that chickens have a very high carriage rate. From 35 chickens purchased by medical practitioners in Swansea for consumption in their homes, 20 were found to have this organism on their surfaces—an incidence of 57%. Both fresh and frozen chickens were examined and both types had a similar high incidence.

Chickens are now a very common food and *Listeria monocytogenes* must, therefore, enter most homes. The fact that there is so little infection suggests that another factor is necessary, and the possibility of the potentiating effect of a toxin of *Escherichia coli*, as suggested by Rolle and Mayer⁴ is worthy of consideration.—We are, etc.,

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¹ Seeliger, H. P. R., Winkhaus-Schindl, I., Andries, L., and Viebahn, A., *Pathologia et Microbiologia*, 1965, 28, 590.