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PROCUREMENTS SECTION
Alphabetical Serial File

SATURDAY 20 NOVEMBER 1971

LEADING ARTICLES

- Cause of Death page 441 Pacemakers for Heart Block page 442 Neurology of the
Leukaemias and Lymphomas page 442 "Challenges for Change" page 443 Herpetic
Whitlow: A Medical Risk page 444 Pregnancy Testing page 444 Laparotomy for Fever
page 445 Volvulus of the Stomach page 446 Colleagues in Health Care page 446

PAPERS AND ORIGINALS

- X Rays and the Structure of Insulin DOROTHY CROWFOOT HODGKIN 447
Serum Gastrin and the Antral Mucosa in Atrophic Gastritis R. G. STRICKLAND, P. S. BHATHAL, M. G. KORMAN, J. HANSKY.. 451
Present Status of Subclinical Intestinal Malabsorption in the Tropics J. M. FALAIYE 454
Fibrin Degradation Products and Ovarian Tumours B. ÅSTEDT, L. SVANBERG, I. M. NILSSON 458
Otolaryngological Aspects of Sjögren's Syndrome
J. A. DOIG, K. WHALEY, W. C. DICK, G. NUKI, J. WILLIAMSON, W. W. BUCHANAN 460
Further Experience with Azathioprine in Rheumatoid Arthritis
JACQUELINE HARRIS, J. D. JESSOP, D. MARK CHAPUT DE SAINTONGE 463
Changing Sex Ratios in Diabetes W. A. NICHOLSON 465
Disseminated Intravascular Coagulation Complicating Infectious Mononucleosis HELEN DODSWORTH, AILEEN BURNS.... 466
Complication of Methotrexate-maintained Remission in Lymphoblastic Leukaemia
R. G. RAWBONE, M. T. SHAW, J. G. JACKSON, K. D. BAGSHAWE 467

MEDICAL PRACTICE

- Management of Ingested Foreign Bodies in Childhood LEWIS SPITZ 469
Elective End-to-side Portacaval Shunt: Results in 64 Cases K. HOURIGAN, SHEILA SHERLOCK, PHYLLIS GEORGE, S. MINDEL.. 473
Results in 1,000 Cases of Therapeutic Abortion Managed by Vacuum Aspiration
K. C. LOUNG, A. E. R. BUCKLE, MARY M. ANDERSON 477
Colleagues in Health Care: The Health Visitor FROM A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT 479
Problems of the Newborn: The Small-for-dates Baby—II ROGER ROBINSON 480
Scientific Basis of Clinical Practice: The Birmingham Scheme R. E. SMITH 483
Any Questions? 484
Personal View DENIS CASHMAN..... 485

CORRESPONDENCE—List of Contents 486

BOOK REVIEWS 496

NEWS AND NOTES

- Medicolegal—Death Certification and Coroners 498
Parliament—Cost-related Prescription Charges 501
Epidemiology—Tortoises; Population Forecasts 501
Medical News 503

OBITUARY NOTICES 494

SUPPLEMENT

- Committee on the E.E.C. 37
"Challenges for Change"—III 39
Crisis in Preclinical Medical Sciences 40
Health Insurance Schemes..... 42
Doctors and "Invisible Earnings"..... 42
Reorganization of N.H.S.: Staff Commissions..... 43
Association Notices 44

CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondents are asked to be brief

Cardiac Transplantation Today Sir Michael Woodruff, F.R.C.S., F.R.S. 486	Pregnancy Testing J. Brodie, F.R.C.PATH, and I. A. Porter, M.D. 489	Reversible Sterilization in the Female A. L. Deacon, F.R.C.O.G. 491
Coronary Deaths—How Unexpected? P. G. F. Nixon, F.R.C.P., and H. J. N. Bethell, M.R.C.P. 486	Care of Chronic Psychotics A. B. Masters, M.D., and others 489	Aetiology of Bell's Palsy A. D. Korczyn, M.D. 491
Hospital Advisory Service A. A. Baker, M.D., D.P.M. 486	Neurofibromatosis and Childhood Leukaemia J. F. Fraumeni, jun., M.D. 489	No Smoking and Life Expectancy G. T. Watts, F.R.C.S. 492
"The Loose Back" J. H. Cyriax, M.D.; D. M. Baker, M.D.; J. H. Davidson, M.B.; J. Barrett, M.B., and D. N. Golding, F.R.C.P.I. 487	Leukaemia on Myeloma S. L. Cohen, M.R.C.P. and others 490	Diagnosis of Cystic Fibrosis A. M. Deall, D.C.H. 492
Digoxin and A-V Block R. Langendorf, M.D., and A. Pick, M.D. 488	Undesired Effects of Clotquinol Therapy Pamela M. LeQuesne, M.D. 490	"Stroke Units" B. Isaacs, F.R.C.P.GLASG. 492
Antibiotic Sensitivity Testing J. D. Neal, F.I.M.L.T.; L. P. Garrod, F.R.C.P., and Sir James Howie, F.R.C.P. 488	Aluminium and Chronic Renal Failure H. Thurston, M.R.C.P., and J. D. Swales, M.D. 490	Epitaph for the M.C.H.C. P. J. Black, M.B. 492
Epidemic Keratoconjunctivitis N. R. Grist, F.R.C.P.ED., and others 488	Trimethoprim/Sulphamethoxazole Mixture in Pregnancy L. M. McEwen, B.M. 490	Nephrotoxicity of Cephaloridine R. D. Foord, M.B. 493
	Chorea and the Oral Contraceptives A. D. Malcolm, M.B. 491	Hospital Information Booklets D. A. Spencer, D.P.M. 493
		Use of English R. Simpson-White, M.B.; J. H. Simpson, F.R.C.P. 493

Cardiac Transplantation Today

SIR,—Your leading article on cardiac transplantation (13 November, p. 377) is most welcome. I would like to join you in paying tribute to Dr. N. Shumway and his colleagues for obtaining results which compare favourably with those reported for renal transplantation by the Kidney Transplant Registry as recently as 1965.

The fact that these results have been achieved by using methods of immunosuppression which are widely known and which have been, and are being, used in renal transplant recipients, disposes of the notion that the immunological barrier in heart transplantation is of a different order of magnitude from that which occurs with kidney transplants—a notion which became current as a result of the numerous dismal failures in various parts of the world which followed Professor C. Barnard's first successful clinical heart transplant some four years ago.

What then are the reasons for Dr. Shumway's success? I would suggest in particular the long period of patient experimental work which preceded the first clinical trial, and the readiness to make use of the lessons already learned by people engaged in clinical transplantation of the kidney. Is there then any reason why, given the same combination of

competence in the fields of cardiac surgery, and immunosuppression, and the characteristics of common sense and humility which Dr. Shumway possesses so abundantly, comparable success to that achieved at Stanford could not be achieved elsewhere?

One factor which might affect the answer to this question concerns the criteria of death applicable to the donor, since this clearly affects the so-called "warm ischaemia time" of the transplant. It would be interesting to know whether the criterion of brain death is used at Stanford, since if this is the case, the question would arise as to whether the heart would tolerate the longer period of ischaemia which would result from using the criteria which are generally accepted in this country. My guess is that a human heart transplant would be no less tolerant of ischaemia than a human kidney transplant. In the last resort only clinical trial will show whether or not this is true, but the first step should be to investigate the question in experimental animals.—I am, etc.,

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Coronary Deaths—How Unexpected?

SIR,—There is a widespread conviction that fatal myocardial infarction strikes with little or no warning. Your nihilistic leading article on "Coronary Deaths" (9 October, p. 64) unhappily reinforces this conviction, because it draws its conclusions from studies which have shown that the conventionally accepted warning signs, such as chest pain and E.C.G.

changes, may be delayed almost to the moment of death. It fails to admit the possibility of a wealth of earlier and therefore more valuable predictive evidence.

It is becoming more widely recognized that myocardial infarction is not a sudden event but the outcome of a long-standing coronary arterial disease process,¹ which may

be well established even in the second and third decades of life.² Necropsies in "unexpected" coronary death show that the pathological changes of this long-standing disease process chiefly affect the blood supply of the left ventricle, and it is reasonable to explore the possibility that dysfunction of the left ventricle could give rise to symptoms and signs long before the stage of pain and muscle necrosis.

We have taken a close interest in the "coronary" personality and the pre-infarction phase of coronary heart disease, and have concluded that there are both recognizable behavioural characteristics and cardiac symptoms and signs of value in the diagnosis of this condition.³ The symptoms suffered by the patient usually extend over many months, during which there is a deterioration of general health, increasing fatigue, and loss of effort capacity with uncomfortable exertional dyspnoea. Business efficiency deteriorates, tensions rise, and irritability becomes more marked, but the patient ignores these symptoms, which he commonly attributes to ageing. We have encountered patients who have lost more than 80% of their usual capacity for physical effort without ever having experienced angina pectoris.⁴ In some cases a single severe attack of ischaemic heart pain on effort acts as a warning not to repeat the experience. It is a common finding that the patient will deny or rationalize a gross deterioration which is obvious to his wife and friends. The aggressive, type A behaviour pattern displayed by many of these individuals has been well described.⁵

The physical sign which indicates that the heart is the probable cause of this deterioration is the palpable and audible atrial gallop, which is most easily elicited by examining the patient in the left lateral position. We have found this sign in 65% of a series of 72