

377

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SATURDAY 10 NOVEMBER 1973

## LEADING ARTICLES

- Towards a Better Service** page 309      **The Solitary Thyroid Nodule** page 310      **New Knowledge of Lymph Nodes** page 311      **Captive Patients** page 312      **Asbestos Hazard** page 313  
**Post-intubation Granuloma** page 313      **Failure to Respond to Levodopa** page 314      **Today's Treatment** page 314

## PAPERS AND ORIGINALS

- Evolution of Bone Disease over 10 Years in 135 Patients with Terminal Renal Failure**  
G. L. V. TATLER, R. A. BAILLOD, Z. VARGHESE, W. B. YOUNG, S. FARROW, M. R. WILLS, J. F. MOORHEAD ..... 315
- Pharmacodynamics of Practolol in Chronic Renal Failure** J. B. EASTWOOD, J. R. CURTIS, R. B. SMITH ..... 320
- Biological Availability of Digoxin from Lanoxin Produced in the United Kingdom**  
B. F. JOHNSON, A. S. E. FOWLE, SUSAN LADER, JENNY FOX, A. D. MUNRO-FAURE ..... 323
- Combined Test for Assessment of Anterior Pituitary Function**  
P. HARSOULIS, J. C. MARSHALL, S. F. KUKU, C. W. BURKE, D. R. LONDON, T. R. FRASER ..... 326
- Lipoid Pneumonia in Infants and Children in South India** S. BALAKRISHNAN ..... 329
- Tetracycline and Acne Vulgaris: A Clinical and Laboratory Investigation**  
W. J. CUNLIFFE, R. A. FORSTER, N. D. GREENWOOD, C. HETHERINGTON, K. T. HOLLAND, R. L. HOLMES, S. KHAN, C. D. ROBERTS, M. WILLIAMS, B. WILLIAMSON ..... 332
- Coma Associated with Vincristine Therapy** J. A. WHITTAKER, D. H. PARRY, C. BUNCH, D. J. WEATHERALL ..... 335
- Candida albicans Septicaemia during First Half of Pregnancy Successfully Treated with 5-Fluorocytosine**  
J. SCHÖNEBECK, E. SEGERBRAND ..... 337
- Expanding Skull Fracture of Childhood** D. P. ADDY ..... 338

## MEDICAL PRACTICE

- Diseases of the Skin: Structure and Function of Skin in Relation to Therapy** J. A. A. HUNTER ..... 340
- Amenorrhoea after Discontinuing Combined Oestrogen-Progestogen Oral Contraceptives**  
S. J. STEELE, BRIDGETT MASON, ANN BRETT ..... 343
- Female Narcotic Addicts: A Follow-up Study of Criminal and Addiction Careers** P. T. d'ORBAN ..... 345
- Medicine in Old Age: Problems of Interpretation of Laboratory Findings in the Old** F. I. CAIRD ..... 348
- Any Questions?** ..... 351
- Personal View** TAYLOR OF HARLOW ..... 353

CORRESPONDENCE—List of Contents ..... 354

OBITUARY NOTICES ..... 361

## NEWS AND NOTES

- Epidemiology**—Salmonella Infection from Raw Milk .... 366
- Parliament**—Queen's Speech; Occupational Deafness .... 366
- Medical News** ..... 367

BOOK REVIEWS ..... 363

## SUPPLEMENT

- New Contracts for Hospital Junior Staff** ..... 31
- Interview with H.J.S.G.C. Chairman** ..... 34
- Joint Consultants Committee—First Reported Meeting** ..... 37
- E.E.C.: Free Movement of Doctors** ..... 39
- Committee on E.E.C.** ..... 40
- Round-up** ..... 41
- B.M.A. Research Awards** ..... 42

# CORRESPONDENCE

*Correspondents are asked to be brief*

## Free Milk from the Sacred Cow

Elizabeth M. Davis, M.B., D.C.H.; J. Twomey, M.B., M.F.C.M. .... 354

## Ascorbic Acid and Common Colds

L. M. Spero, PH.D., and T. W. Anderson, B.M., PH.D. .... 354

## Oral Contraceptives and Thromboembolism

P. G. T. Bye, M.B. .... 354

## Psychiatric Aspects of Sterilization

H. G. Sturzaker, F.R.C.S. .... 355

## Selection for Treatment in Spina Bifida

Cystica

J. Lister, F.R.C.S.GLASG. .... 355

## Buying Added Years

A. P. Grant, F.R.C.P. .... 355

## Detection of Hypertension in Childhood

Jennifer M. H. Loggie, M.B. .... 356

## Biochemical "Desensitization" to Violence

L. Mosonyi, M.D. .... 356

## Exposure to Radiation

R. Oldham, M.B. .... 356

## Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids and Cancer

J. Mertin, M.D. .... 357

## Anaesthetic Safety Devices

H. T. Davenport, F.R.C.P.(C), and B. M. Wright, M.B. .... 357

## Selection of Patients for Clinical Trials

R. N. Herrington, M.B., D.P.M.; P. J. Tyrer, M.R.C.P. .... 357

## Influenza Vaccination

J. D. Avison, M.B. .... 358

## Diabetic Pregnancy

M. I. Drury, F.R.C.P.I. .... 358

## Crohn's Disease and Intestinal Cancer

M. Patricia Prior, B.Sc. .... 358

## Mobile Coronary Care Provided by Ambulance Personnel

W. S. Parker, M.B., F.F.C.M. .... 359

## Non-accidental Injury to Children

A. G. Gibson, M.B. .... 358

## Palmerston on Cholera

G. Don, LL.D. .... 359

## Mode of Action of Polyene Antibiotics

B. N. Kliger, PH.D., and S. M. Hammond, B.Sc. .... 359

## Loud Knocking on the Back Door

O. Dearlove, B.A. .... 360

## Lavatory Doors

S. Mackenzie, M.F.C.M. .... 360

## Surgery on Day Patients

R. T. Burkitt, F.R.C.S. .... 360

## The AP Syndrome

J. C. Kelsey, F.R.C.PATH. .... 360

## British Society for Population Studies

E. Grebenik, M.Sc. .... 360

## Medical Officers' Prospects

Surgeon Commander D. S. Wright, M.B. .... 360

## Free Milk from the Sacred Cow

SIR,—It was surprising to read in your leading article (27 October, p. 183) the suggestion that the school medical service is in no position to judge which children would benefit from dietary supplements. On the contrary, the school doctor is in constant communication with teachers, school councilors, and health visitors who become well aware of the children sent to school without proper breakfast. The doctor is experienced in distinguishing between underfed underfed children and those who are slim and fit. Many of these children are underfed adolescents in the lower forms of secondary schools where there is no statutory provision for milk supplements. Provision of a morning milk drink to children of this age group, where there is medical need, could be of great benefit.—I am, etc.,

E. M. DAVIS

Ashted, Surrey

service than that which you postulate.—I am, etc.,

J. TWOMEY

Borough Health Department,  
Halesowen, Worcs

## Ascorbic Acid and Common Colds

SIR,—We share the concern expressed in your leading article (11 August, p. 311) that, though many people are taking substantial quantities of ascorbic acid, little is known about the possible harmful effects of taking too much.

In the first large-scale Toronto study "side effects" were no more frequent in the 400 subjects receiving 1 g of vitamin C daily than in an equal number receiving placebo.<sup>1</sup> This apparent lack of toxicity is also seen in the preliminary results of a more recent study in which approximately 300 subjects received 2 g of vitamin C daily. However, we would caution that not only were both studies of relatively short duration (approximately 12 weeks), but the vitamin C was mainly in the form of the sodium and calcium salts rather than the free acid. Furthermore, while the group averages are reassuring, they would be unlikely to reveal the existence of the occasional individual who might be unable to tolerate regular doses of this magnitude.<sup>2</sup>

We also doubt whether a regular daily intake of 1 g or more will prove to be of any great clinical value, since the body appears to make a rapid adaptation to this increased load. In a study involving 25 healthy individuals on a daily dose of 1 or 2 g of ascorbate for 12 weeks resting blood levels of ascorbic acid rose initially, but returned to pretreatment levels in about 10 days. Following cessation of treatment abnormally low resting levels developed, but once again there was rapid adaptation, and pre-

treatment levels were restored in 10-14 days. However, these findings do not rule out the possibility that the occasional individual may be unable to revert to normal quickly enough, particularly if the treatment period were extended over a period of a year or more, and the consequences of this "rebound" reduction in blood levels should be investigated more thoroughly. The possibility that such individuals could develop frank scurvy should not be discounted.<sup>3</sup>

In the present state of uncertainty we believe that the regular intake of more than 100-200 mg of vitamin C daily should be discouraged, and that gram-doses—if used at all—should be restricted to the short-term treatment of acute episodes of illness. Even here it must be recognized that the ratio of benefit to hazard is unknown, but at least there is some evidence that large doses may be necessary to maintain tissue levels during acute infections,<sup>4,5</sup> and the risks of such short-term therapy are probably minimal.—We are, etc.,

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University of Toronto,  
Toronto

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, T. W., Reid, D. B. W., and Beaton, G. H., *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 1972, **107**, 503.

<sup>2</sup> Briggs, M. H., Garcia-Webb, P., and Davies, P., *Lancet*, 1973, **2**, 201.

<sup>3</sup> Rhead, W. J., and Schrauzer, G. N., *Nutrition Reviews*, 1971, **29**, 262.

<sup>4</sup> Hume, R., and Weyers, E., *Scottish Medical Journal*, 1973, **18**, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, C. W. M., and Loh, H. S., *Lancet*, 1973, **1**, 638.

## Oral Contraceptives and Thromboembolism

SIR,—The time is ripe for a new, clear exposition of the statistical correlations between oral contraceptives and thromboembolism.

It has become customary to quote the