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LEADING ARTICLES

Childhood poisoning: prevention and first-aid management.....	483	Low-protein diets in chronic renal failure	486
English for overseas doctors.....	484	Immunotherapy for multiple sclerosis.....	486
More on liver tumours and the pill	484	Great expectations from proximal vagotomy..	487
Risks of amniocentesis.....	485	Management of acute pancreatitis.....	488

PAPERS AND ORIGINALS

Outbreak of Marburg virus disease in Johannesburg	
J S S GEAR, G A CASSEL, A J GEAR, B TRAPPLER, L CLAUSEN, A M MEYERS, M C KEW, T H BOTHWELL, R SHER, G B MILLER, J SCHNEIDER, H J KOORNHOF, E D GOMPERS, M ISAÄCSON, J H S GEAR.....	489
Changes in breast volume during normal menstrual cycle and after oral contraceptives	
D MILLIGAN, J O DRIFE, R V SHORT.....	494
Histological evidence of carcinoma in a hepatic tumour associated with oral contraceptives	
M DAVIS, B PORTMANN, M SEARLE, RALPH WRIGHT, ROGER WILLIAMS.....	496
Mastalgia and total body water	P E PREECE, A R RICHARDS, G M OWEN, L E HUGHES..... 498
Regulation of 3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaryl coenzyme-A reductase activity in type II hyperlipoproteinaemia	
D J BETTERIDGE, M J P HIGGINS, D J GALTON.....	500
Endoscopic removal of a duodenal foreign body	M H THOMPSON..... 502
Oestrogen and androgen receptors in breast cancer and response to endocrine therapy	
J P PERSIJN, C B KORSTEN, E ENGELSMAN.....	503
Hypokalaemic periodic paralysis complicating thyrotoxicosis	K ALI..... 503
Non-absorbable cystic duct ligatures and common bile duct calculi	C E NEWMAN, J D HAMER..... 504

MEDICAL PRACTICE

Role of pelvimetry in active management of labour	D N JOYCE, F GIWA-OSAGIE, G W STEVENSON.....	505
Information contained in drug advertisements	GERRY V STIMSON.....	508
Histories obtained by two-stage questionnaire with automated transcript in specialist gynaecological practice		
D W ROBINSON, G L WALMSLEY, JANE C HORROCKS, PAULINE MILSON, D M JENKINS, F T DE DOMBAL, J S SCOTT.....		510
The clinical psychologist in a health centre: one year's work	T A MCALLISTER, A E PHILIP.....	513
Any Questions?		507, 509
Materia Non Medica—Contributions from STEPHEN MILLER, JOHN C RYLE, EOIN O'BRIEN.....	U. S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE	515
Personal View	KRISHNA SOMERS.....	NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY 516

CORRESPONDENCE—List of Contents.....	517
---	-----

NEWS AND NOTES

Epidemiology—Widespread salmonellosis from contaminated meats	529
Medicolegal—No-fault liability.....	529
Parliament—Debate on Queen's Speech—NHS.....	531
Medical News—GPs support junior doctors' stand.....	532
BMA Notices	533

OBITUARY NOTICES.....	525
------------------------------	-----

BOOK REVIEWS.....	528
--------------------------	-----

PROCUREMENT SECTION	
SUPPLEMENT	
The Week.....	534
HJSC: Chairman and executive voted out	535
Mrs Castle talks to juniors' new team.....	538

CORRESPONDENCE

Salt overdosage R A Goodbody, FRCPATH, and others; Carol Fitzpatrick, MRCP.517	Cryosurgery for piles P F Schofield, FRCS, and M C Wilson, FRCS.520	Smoke-polluted food R A Binning, FFARCS.522
Biopsy of nasopharynx as staging procedure in Hodgkin's disease A Björklund, MD, and others.517	Access by GPs to physiotherapy services Marjorie Ross, MCSP.520	Redistribution of resources N H Rathod, FRCPsych.522
Early thymectomy for myasthenia gravis A E Kark, FRCS.518	HLA antigens in haemochromatosis Jacqueline M Walters, MB, and others.520	Junior hospital staff contract J F Calder, MB, DMRD, and others; S K Goolamali, MRCP.522
Trainer-teaching techniques G W Taylor, MRCP.518	Overprescription of psychotropic drugs S I Cohen, FRCPsych.520	Industrial action K D Jones, MB; F H Tyrer, MRCS; I J Reece, MRCS; N W J Oliver, MRCP.523
Renal transplantation D O Oliver, FRCP, and P J Morris, FRCS.518	Organisation of cardiac surgical services T A H English, FRCS, and B B Milstein, FRCS.521	Membership of the JCC G M Komrower, FRCP.523
Whooping-cough vaccination N R Grist, FRCPATH.519	Amoebic meningitis Air Vice-Marshal W P Stamm, FRCP.521	Points from letters Cow's milk intolerance (J B Tracey); Playground accidents (R M Forrester); Cigarette smoking and chest pain (T T Stamm); Heart block and myxoedema (F I Lee); Sex education (E Christopher); Mucolytic agents and sputum testing (Sarah Knott); Cervical vertigo (J H Ebbetts); Road traffic accident payments (J K Gosnold); Decentralisation in the NHS (D J Kenny); Training the young doctor (I B Chait and P Rader); Junior hospital staff contract (M G Rinsler; Anne C Metten).523
Treatment of Wilson's disease D P Vaughan, PHD, and R Kaderbhai.519	Anaemia, smoking, and pregnancy R W Payne, FRCPATH.521	
Student views on continuous assessment M D Goldman, MB.519	Hyperactivity in children D Bryce-Smith, DSC, and H A Waldron, MB.521	
Adrenaline in treatment of anaphylaxis L M McEwen, MB.519	Mortality of pathologists and medical laboratory technicians G Dean, FRCP.521	
Contraceptive practice and unplanned pregnancy in students M A Lucy King, PHD.519	Folic acid deficiency during intensive therapy R M Ibbotson, MRCPATH, and others.522	

Correspondents are urged to write briefly so that readers may be offered as wide a selection of letters as possible. So many are being received that the omission of some is inevitable. Letters should be signed personally by all their authors.

Salt overdosage

SIR,—Having very recently published an account of two fatalities due to saline emetics,¹ we read Dr R C M McGouran's report of a further case with partial recovery of brain damage due to hypernatraemia with interest (15 November, p 386). Other examples of recovery have been recorded by Capper² and by Schatz.³

Now that this serious complication is proved, the administration of salt emetics should always be followed by early and repeated estimation of the plasma electrolytes so that appropriate treatment of hypernatraemia may be instituted in time to avert brain damage. First-aid manuals and medical textbooks should reconsider the advisability of recommending salt emesis without warning about the dangers of overdosage.⁴ We suspect that in the past neurological deterioration and death have mistakenly been attributed to the ingested poison for which the salt was administered when hypernatraemia was the true cause.

The close resemblance between some hypernatremic brains and anoxic-ischaemic brain damage has doubtless contributed to failure to recognise this important syndrome at necropsy. From our experience we would not subscribe fully to Dr McGouran's rather mechanistic theory of the pathology of the brain damage. Bleeding is not an invariable feature and the changes are more likely to be explicable on a molecular basis than

attributable solely to simple shearing stresses upon the vessels.

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- Capper, J, *St Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*, 1975, 79, 365.
- Schatz, W J, *Medical Record*, 1937, 145, 487.
- Black's Medical Dictionary*, 29th edn, p 309. London, Black, 1971.

SIR,—In his case report (15 November, p 386) of the management of an adult with salt overdosage Dr R C M McGouran states that his patient was treated with "frusemide and dextrose given as fast as possible by intravenous infusion." In recent years we have learnt much about the safest way to treat hypernatraemia in paediatric practice. Several studies have shown that slow rehydration with a polyionic solution (usually dextrose in 0.18% saline) is associated with a far lower incidence of convulsions during treatment, irrespective of the severity of the hypernatraemia.^{1,2} I cannot see how the situation can be so different in an adult and suggest that the generalised convulsions which began during treatment and were uncontrollable in

Dr McGouran's patient may have resulted from cerebral oedema due to too rapid reduction in serum sodium.

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Biopsy of nasopharynx as staging procedure in Hodgkin's disease

SIR,—The remarkable progress that has been achieved during the past decade in the treatment of Hodgkin's disease is partly due to the introduction of new methods for charting the extent of the disease before the beginning of treatment.

Most patients with Hodgkin's disease present with cervical lymphadenopathy. The nodes in the neck drain, among other structures, the nasopharynx. But the occurrence of nasopharyngeal involvement in Hodgkin's disease has been reported only in individual cases.

During the past six years 76 new patients with Hodgkin's disease underwent a detailed prospective ear, nose, and throat examination, which in 45 cases included a biopsy of the nasopharyngeal mucosa. The main reason for not performing a biopsy in 31 was a normal finding at the ENT examination. Seven out of the 45 biopsied patients proved to have abnormal microscopic findings in the nasopharynx, four having clearcut Hodgkin's disease and three abnormal changes sug-