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LEADING ARTICLES

BCG vaccination.....	603	Cardiac contusion.....	606
Teething myths.....	604	Smoking in the elderly.....	607
Books for Christmas.....	604	Management of acute cholecystitis.....	607
Bronchiectasis today.....	604	Cancer risks from hormone treatment.....	608
Search for presymptomatic large bowel cancer.....	605		

PAPERS AND ORIGINALS

Primary ventricular fibrillation and resumption of work, sexual activity, and driving after first acute myocardial infarction B KUSHNIR, K M FOX, I W TOMLINSON, R W PORTAL, CLIVE P ABER.....	609
Lactic acidosis complicating treatment of ketosis of labour ANTHONY C AMES, STEPHANIE COBBOLD, JEFFREY MADDOCK.....	611
Acute lymphoblastic leukaemia: cyclical chemotherapy with three combinations of four drugs (COAP-POMP-CART regimen) A S D SPIERS, P D ROBERTS, G W MARSH, S J PAREKH, A J FRANKLIN, D A G GALTON, Z L SZUR, ELIZABETH A PAUL, P HUSBAND, EVE WILTSHAW.....	614
Current "corrected" calcium concept challenged R W PAIN, K M ROWLAND, P J PHILLIPS, B MCL DUNCAN.....	617
Effect on adrenal function of topically applied clobetasol propionate (Dermovate) C F ALLENBY, R A MAIN, R A MARSDEN, C G SPARKES.....	619
The monocystic ovary syndrome J W DELAHUNT, R V CLEMENTS, I D RAMSAY, J NEWTON, W P COLLINS, J LANDON.....	621
Paradoxical rise in blood pressure during propranolol treatment I BLUM, A ATSMON, M STEINER, H WYSENBECK.....	623
Monitoring muscle weakness in neonatal myasthenia gravis A A HUTCHISON, D J LLOYD, G RUSSELL.....	623
Unusual complication of high-dose frusemide J P WAUTERS.....	624
Relapsing Coombs-negative haemolytic anaemia in pregnancy with haemolytic disease in the newborn A ELDOR, S YATZIV, C HERSHKO.....	625
Plasma zinc in acute starvation R W HENRY, MARGARET E ELMES.....	625
Axillary artery occlusion and pulmonary tuberculosis GEOFFREY NICHOLSON, A K SACHDEVA.....	626

MEDICAL PRACTICE

Some Christmas Books

Textbooks and the teacher? R HOFFENBERG.....	627
What sort of a book does the student want? JOHN LAUNER.....	628
The future RAYMOND GREENE.....	630
A Christmas present for oneself ALASDAIR BRECKENRIDGE.....	630
Occupational medicine: past, present, and future LORD TAYLOR.....	631
Social policy and the NHS RUDOLF KLEIN.....	634
James Joyce—a case history ALEX PATON.....	636
The ordeal of Evelyn Waugh ELIOT SLATER.....	638
Medical tales of captivity J C CAMERON.....	639
Other reviews.....	640
Materia Non Medica—Contributions from JOHN A S SHAW, ALEX PATON, F J NAPIER, J B BOURKE.....	643
Personal View STEPHEN LOCK.....	644

CORRESPONDENCE—List of contents.....	645
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NEWS AND NOTES

Epidemiology—Viruses this winter.....	656
Parliament—Private patients.....	657
Medical News—Memorial service for Professor Fairley..	657
BMA Notices.....	658

SUPPLEMENT

The Week.....	659
EEC Doctors meet in London.....	660
General Medical Services Committee.....	661
Scottish committees discuss hospital crises.....	663
Juniors' contract dispute—BMA letter to Mrs Barbara Castle and her reply.....	665

CORRESPONDENCE

The profession, the Government, and the Health Service

A J M Cavenagh, BM; S O Aylett, FRCS; J A G Paris, MRCP; D H Nelson, FRCR, and E B Lewis, FFARCS; H Annett, MB; Frances M M Rochford, MB, and R F Massey, MB; S R Brennan, MRCP; R E Irvine, FRCP. 645

Metal sensitivity in patients with joint prostheses

G K McKee, FRCS; D A Jones, FRCS, and H K Lucas, MCHORTH. 646

Use of clonazepam in epilepsy

H L Halliday, MB, and J F T Glasgow, MRCP. 647

"Syrup of ipecacuanha"

M S Fraser, FRCPED; G R Brown, FPS. 647

Streptococcus mutans and dental caries

T K Clarke, MB. 647

Oculocutaneous reactions to beta-blocking drugs

R Marks, MRCP; P J Richardson, MRCP, and others. 648

Enteric-coated aspirin overdose and gastric perforation

J M Gumpel, MRCP. 648

Nutrition rehabilitation units

W A M Cutting, MRCPED; M A Church, MFCM. 648

Dietary fibre hypothesis

Reverend H C Trowell, FRCP. 649

Irrigation of the vas for immediate sterility after vasectomy

J Slome, MB. 649

Hormones, elderly testes, and carcinoma of the prostate

F K Habib, PHD, and S R Stitch, PHD. 650

Ischaemic necrosis of lesser curve of stomach

P D Mohr, MRCP. 650

Deaths in asthma

H E Lewis, MRCS. 650

Lung cancer and chronic bronchitis

D Davies, FRCP. 650

Oral contraceptives and premenstrual tension

Ellen C G Grant, MB. 651

Sight in newborn babies

A C L Mackie. 651

Changing status of doctors

J Eskola, MD, and others. 651

Patient care under the NHS

N F Coghill, FRCP. 651

Salary increments and anti-inflation policy

J A Child, MD. 651

Superannuation: FSSU parallel arrangements

A M Stewart, FRCSed. 651

London weighting allowances

A J Crisp, MB. 652

Points from Letters Rabies (J H Mitchell); "Happy death day" (A Mair; W R Bytheway); Treatment of diabetes insipidus (N D Walsh); Priorities in health care (H E Thomas); Industrial action (J S Gilmore; N Marsden; P D Exon; I F Groatorex; J B Berry; F M Sandford; Hazel M Rawlinson; Anne E Roberts; Mary S Walshaw; Margaret E Grimshaw, and S K Kar); Future of the NHS (A F Pentecost; A N Hill); Private practice and the NHS (A S Woolstone). 652

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.

The profession, the Government, and the Health Service

SIR,—We have tried to play the game by trade union rules, reasonably enough since these are the rules the political part of the country appears to understand. But the result now must have every purveyor of medical care from Hippocrates to Aneurin Bevan turning in his grave.

The consultants and juniors are fighting separate battles, but ultimately it is the standing and independence of the profession which are at stake for us all. General practitioners cannot remain uncommitted in the face of limited hospital facilities, and they are as interested as anyone in the outcome.

Has not the time come for the united profession to submit dated resignations, giving ourselves perhaps more than the stipulated three months' notice? This would enable us to prepare the basis of a new Health Service in which all patients could be accorded the dignity and time at present available only to the private sector, since the Government has a statutory obligation to accept the financial burden of the Health Service. Only from the secure base of a position outside the present Service shall we be able to play a significant role in planning its successor.

Having submitted resignations, let us all return to work with might and main before some avoidable tragedy occurs.

A J M CAVENAGH

Brecon

SIR,—This is the saddest time for British medicine. With juniors, sometimes led by those alien to this country and on occasions

refusing to assist their chiefs, surely such a disastrous policy should not have the approval, let alone the active support, of the BMA.

Now the Association encourages the consultants to follow a similar course of action. There must be many who cannot subscribe to this advice. It is idle to pretend that patients will not suffer. They will, perhaps disastrously, and few of us can support a course, whatever its objective, which has dangers such as this.

The country is fully aware of the discontent felt by all grades of hospital staff. Let the BMA now withdraw its support for industrial action and advise a return to normal working in the hope that the Government will not see such a step as weakness but as a wish for conciliation and as a hope for further full discussion of all our difficulties before any fundamental changes are considered in the running of the National Health Service.

S O AYLETT

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SIR,—I am disappointed by the success Mrs Castle has had in pinning down the doctors on two narrow issues when a much wider issue is in fact at stake. Indeed, she has managed to make us act on two issues where it can successfully be argued that we have put self-interest before that of our patients; yet the real issue that confronts us all, patients and doctors, is the whole future of the Health Service we pay for and work in.

We must shout and shout loudly that it is the Health Service itself that will fold unless Mrs Castle accepts compromises now. May I suggest the following. (1) An urgent re-appraisal of the administrative structure with the intention of cutting administrative costs by at least 30%. (2) Removal of all politically motivated policies being forced on the Health Service without adequate representation from all concerned, including patients. (3) Reappraisal of the juniors' 40-hour week contract with consideration to be given to the improvement of conditions of employment such as subsidised mortgages and better continuity of employment. I am sure the Government will be prepared to concede considerable advances in this field in exchange for the juniors agreeing to stick to the present pay code. This opportunity to improve the lot of junior doctors should not be missed. Furthermore, I suggest that the BMA gets together with the nursing and auxiliary staff unions and with representatives from patient protection bodies to attempt to thrash out a common policy towards the Health Service. We must show the public and Mrs Castle that our true concern is for the Health Service itself. At present we are following a lot of other worker representative bodies in showing interest mainly in ourselves. If we do care about our patients as much as ourselves, and I am sure as a profession we do, then let us say so in deed as well as word.

In an attempt to provide negotiating time may I suggest that: (1) we stop all industrial action except the collection of resignations; (2) we seek resignations from all doctors employed in the Health Service; (3) We negotiate from the point that as doctors we feel the NHS no longer provides patients with the care to which they are entitled and for which they pay; and (4) until the Government sees fit to reconsider its present policy our patients' interest will be better served by a non-public system.