

Psychotic Reaction to Atropine Drops

SIR,—Reactions such as have been described by Dr. P. J. Daly (*Journal*, April 18, p. 1043) are indeed rare, but they would be more rare still if it were realized that one drop of 1% atropine sulphate produces total cycloplegia in two hours.

I arrived at this conclusion many years ago after refracting a series of 50 children. The refraction was carried out at half-hourly intervals up to the end of two hours, after the instillation of one drop of atropine. Thereafter atropine was given daily for a week, and the refraction carried out once again. In no case was there found any further cycloplegia at the end of the week than was found at the end of two hours.—I am, etc.,

Southport General Infirmary.

DAVID RANKINE.

Lumbar Puncture

SIR,—One of the most frequently noted drawbacks to spinal anaesthesia and also to lumbar puncture for other purposes is headache, said to be due to leakage of cerebrospinal fluid through the hole in the meninges. The needle commonly used for lumbar puncture is a wide-bore affair; for some reason I have never understood, the "Vienna" (or "Duttner") needle is apparently almost unknown in this country.

Whilst I was engaged in gynaecological surgery in India some years ago I rarely had the services of a trained anaesthetist, nor had the science of general anaesthetics reached its present remarkable efficiency. In consequence I almost invariably operated under spinal anaesthesia—with "nupercaine" (cinchocaine)—giving the anaesthetic myself through the Duttner needle, the use of which I had learnt in Vienna in 1930. It consists of a stout needle used to penetrate only through the intervertebral ligament, whilst a fine-bore needle inside it can then be pushed a further 1 cm. through the meninges to tap the C.S.F. From an experience in India of many hundreds of cases I found that under this procedure "spinal" headaches were practically unknown.—I am, etc.,

East Grinstead, Sussex.

W. C. SPACKMAN.

Psychosomatic Disorders in Children

SIR,—I have read Dr. Lindsey W. Batten's article on psychosomatic disorders in children (*Journal*, April 25, p. 1109). Among the many points he raises in the study of the family environment he does not mention the helpful effect of exercise. This activity, with, it is hoped, fresh air, has always been a medical treatment. Sensible exercise can bring the necessary calm to the patient and peace to the skin or bronchioles. A similar peace is felt after the pain of the dentist or some specialist clearing "septic foci," and in some way must cause "new circuits" to be used or cleared.—I am, etc.,

St. Luke's Hospital,
Armagh.

D. G. MAYNE.

Hazards of Ship Surgeons

SIR,—In your issue of April 18 (p. 1051) your legal correspondent reviewed the medico-legal hazards of a ship surgeon and concluded his article with the timely advice that a ship surgeon should "ensure that his medical defence society covers him outside England."

Through its overseas indemnity scheme the Medical Protection Society has for over twenty years provided

world-wide cover for members practising overseas with the exception of claims falling within the jurisdiction of the courts of the United States of America. The Society has recently recognized, however, that a member acting in the capacity of a ship surgeon is liable to be sued in the U.S.A. courts by a patient treated on board ship, and has decided to cover these members against this risk without any increase in the existing scale of subscriptions for overseas indemnity.—I am, etc.,

London, W.C.2.

ALISTAIR FRENCH,
Secretary,
Medical Protection Society.

Subject in Search of a Name

SIR,—With reference to Professor L. J. Witts's letter (*Journal*, May 2, p. 1190) there is prejudice, which I share with Gordon,¹ against the use of the word "health" on the ground that attempts have been made to divorce it from medicine, with the mistaken idea that it is a nobler appellation, whereas the dividing line between one and the other is far from clear. On the other hand, we have the association of paediatrics with child health, which seems to pass without any degree of criticism, so it would seem that preventive medicine and public health could quite as easily go together.

Social medicine in its present usage refers essentially to the epidemiological method, including its application to the study of genetic as well as environmental and domestic factors in the aetiology of disease. Public health, alone, though not easily defined, does not seem to take into account this new aspect of comprehensive epidemiology. Environmental medicine or community medicine fails to include the vast field of knowledge, law, and practice which has accumulated under the term public health since the first Public Health Act of 1848. Like many other terms, the connotation of hygiene has altered over the years, yet the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines it as "Principles of health; sanitary science." The bias at the present time would appear to be towards the second meaning, so that alone it could not stand for this "subject in search of a name," but, coupled with preventive medicine and given its full meaning, this branch of medical knowledge could be called "Preventive Medicine and Hygiene."—I am, etc.,

Birmingham, 13.

V. A. LLOYD.

REFERENCE

- ¹ Gordon, I., *Lancet*, 1958, 2, 638.

SIR,—Professor L. J. Witts's invitation (*Journal*, May 2, p. 1190) for a name for the subject variously known as public health, epidemiology, social medicine, human ecology, population pathology, or group medicine makes me wonder whether the term "Mass Medicine" would not fit the bill, as this adjective is already used in "Mass Miniature Radiography," where also a collection of people are studied.—I am, etc.,

Wilmington,
near Dartford, Kent.

RUDOLPH PAYNE.

SIR,—If my memory does not fail me, public health has been called "environmental medicine." Even though it sounds nice, it has not gained much popularity. Perhaps we can include public health, social welfare, etc. (*Journal*, May 2, p. 1190), under the term "external medicine."—I am, etc.,

East Fortune Hospital,
North Berwick.

M. S. N. RAO.