person other than a widow, widower, or single person can claim a housekeeper allowance in spite of representations from professional women's organizations, this being politically unacceptable. Also a wife's earned income allowance is unrelated to her family responsibilities. I suggest that a married woman who has children under 16 or a dependent relative and who is in at least half-time employment should be given an earned income allowance that increases with the number dependants. This would enable her to pay for adequate domestic help, thus increasing her work capacity without seeing her own wages disappear in essential expenses.—I am, etc.,

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SIR,—Your leading article "State of Health" (28 December, p. 732) quotes figures which show that only a minority of British-trained women doctors are fully employed in senior posts within the N.H.S. It does not quantify part-time work by women, nor the loss to the community of trained doctors by emigration.

Dr. Dora Black (15 February, p. 393) seeks a solution to the problems of "women" doctors so that "a large work force, eager to use their skills" can return to adequately paid employment, bearing in mind the financial consequences of such work which includes, in Dr. Black's submission, the substantial sum of £1330 per annum devoted entirely to her home and family.

When this distressing problem is considered it must be accepted that any success in the medical profession depends on the right skills being supplied where and when these are required. Such demands are not easily compatible with motherhood. Medically qualified mothers, presumably eager to have children, may then have to make sacrifices from either their own professional aspirations and purses or their husbands'. Would they be helped if we were all paid more? This could prevent some of them dropping out, but there might be inconvenient competition from potential emigrés. Is it possible to produce sick patients in the right place and at the right time, or do the rest of us cope increasingly with the emergency work in unpopular places? Should we seriously consider extra pay for some doctors to provide for their children's care, fillet steaks, and these unimaginable exclusively medical clothes in the face of existing tax differentials? What are the inequalities in returns from professional journals and conferences?

It is time Dr. Black and her fellow-sufferers examined their position honestly and before too many women students give up in despair. As a whole-time consultant psychiatrist (and a woman) I would assure such students that I at least have been treated absolutely fairly by my male colleagues. It is only when professional women seek to gratify their maternal instincts that they must choose between having their cake and eating it; the choice is theirs. It would be a pleasant change to hear some constructive suggestions from those medical mothers who feel that work is worth while instead of a constant stream of excuses and demands for preferential treatment.—I am, etc.,

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Alpha-fetoprotein in Amoebic Colitis and Liver Abscess

SIR,—I would like to report the association of amoebic colitis and amoebic liver abscesses with the finding of α -fetoprotein (AFP) in the serum, as evidenced by the following case. To the best of my knowledge this association has not been previously described.

A 59-year-old Negro man presented with a two-week history of bloody diarrhoea, painful abdominal swelling, and anorexia. He was dehydrated, cachectic, anaemic, and deeply jaundiced. There was right basal atelectasis and a tender, soft, fluctuant mass of 10 cm diameter arising from the liver. The testes were normal. Serum protein was 61 g/l, total bilirubin 213.75 μ mol/l (12.5 mg/100 ml), of which 104.3 μ mol/l (6.1 mg/100 ml) was conjugated. All hepatic enzyme levels were grossly elevated, the prothrombin index was 60%, and the E.S.R. was 120 mm in the first hour (Westergren). *Entamoeba histolytica* was recovered from the stool and from malodorous blood-stained aspirate from the liver. Tests for serum AFP, utilizing the Ouchterlony immunodiffusion method, were positive. In spite of energetic therapy the patient died and necropsy confirmed an enormous hepatic abscess. There was no evidence of cirrhosis, and careful search failed to reveal any tumour. The intestine showed numerous abscesses. The testes were normal.

AFP has been demonstrated as a measurable parameter of malignancy, more particularly of primary hepatocellular carcinoma and embryonic tumours of the ovary and testis. However, this protein has been demonstrated in the serum of patients with gastric,^{1,4} pancreatic,⁵ and oesophageal carcinoma,⁶ in each case with hepatic metastases. False positive results unassociated with malignancy are rare but have been reported in viral hepatitis⁷⁻⁹ and cirrhosis,⁷ though in the latter the possibility of subclinical primary liver cell carcinoma could not be excluded. In 16 clinical cases of amoebic abscess, five confirmed pathologically, tests for AFP were negative.⁷

Though a positive AFP test is good corroborative evidence of hepatic or gonadal malignancy, the possibility of other conditions should be borne in mind. With the increased sensitivity of radioimmunoassay over immunodiffusion techniques it is quite possible that other hepatic diseases will be found to be associated with the presence of the specific globulin in the serum. Experimental evidence to support this is available from Purves,⁹ who has shown that the administration of dimethylnitrosamine to baboons causes a rise in AFP level during the early hepatotoxic stage, during liver regeneration following a rest period, and once a tumour is established.

It is concluded that a hepatic mass with positive AFP test should not exclude treatable disease without further investigation, and a study of the incidence of AFP positivity in benign space-occupying lesions of the liver would be of interest.—I am, etc.,

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Levodopa and Dopadecarboxylase in Treatment of Postural Hypotension

SIR,—We wish to report the case of a man aged 65 who for many years had suffered from severe postural hypotension, which latterly had been associated with an extrapyramidal syndrome. This had been treated with levodopa. At that time a study by rheoencephalography of the patient's postural regulatory mechanisms showed an obvious decrease in cerebral blood flow when the blood pressure fell, despite an accompanying tachycardia and vasoconstriction of the leg vessels. These symptoms were unlike those seen in the Shy-Drager syndrome.¹ The hypotension was unaffected by treatment with dihydroergotamine, phenylephrine, and heptaminol together with levodopa.

In 1974 Modopar (levodopa with benserazide) was substituted for levodopa. After three weeks further study by rheoencephalography showed an increase in cerebral blood flow when the patient was sitting, which, nevertheless, was associated with as large a fall in blood pressure as in the previous study (from 125/90 mmHg to 60/40 mmHg). Despite this fall the patient did not feel faint.

These findings invite three comments. (1) Blood pressure measurements in postural hypotension are not a good guide to the state of cerebral blood flow.² (2) The findings corroborate in man the part played by central catecholamines in the postural regulation of cerebral blood flow already shown in animals.³ (3) There is a chemically and anatomically distinct action on the nervous mechanisms responsible for the postural regulation of cerebral blood flow and the arterial blood pressure.⁴—We are, etc.,

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Men, Women, and Obesity

SIR,—The self-assessment of body size, referred to in your leading article (2 November, p. 249), is an area of increasing interest. The paper by Ashwell and Etchell¹ which you discussed presents data that indicate that 90% of overweight women and 70% of overweight men considered themselves to be overweight.

Further insight on the subject of body size perception is obtained from our study in two Scottish towns. During a health survey of all the primary schoolchildren in one school in each town the children's mothers were asked in a self-administered questionnaire to give their height and weight. A random sample of 40 mothers