

## NEWS AND NOTES

## Views

What is a stargazing fetus? A fetus presenting as a breech with a hyperextended head (*British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 1981;**88**:101-4). Such babies should be delivered by caesarean section: vaginal delivery carries a high risk of permanent neurological disabilities.

On one of those grey, overcast days that belie the approach of spring Minerva came across Beck's Hopelessness Scale. A report in the "*British Journal of Clinical Psychology*" (1981;**20**:11-4) of research using the scale mentions only a few statements such as: "It is very unlikely I will get any real satisfaction in the future." She was feeling too blue to risk scoring her own mood.

Mechanical bull rides are popular in amusement arcades because they capture the thrill of the bucking broncho. Not surprisingly, rhabdomyolysis and myoglobinuria may result from the exertions (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1981;**304**:427), as in karate and conga drumming. Are there any reports in the genuine cowboy, Minerva wonders.

A prospective study of 1337 medical students at Johns Hopkins, reported in the "*Journal of Chronic Diseases*" (1981;**34**:41-4), shows that death in early adult life by suicide or from cancer shows one pattern of premorbid characteristics (lack of closeness to parents, morbid pathological Rorschach) while premature death from coronary disease shows another (close family background, short stature, and depression under stress).

Nearly half the infections that occur in patients having chemotherapy for cancer are acquired from hospital organisms (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1981;**304**:433-5). Salads and uncooked vegetables appear to be a potent source of pathogens which are apt to colonise the gut in these patients with lowered resistance.

Alcoholic excess may be associated with Parkinsonism, according to a report in "*Annals of Neurology*" (1981;**9**:84-6). Transient attacks were seen in seven patients either during bouts of heavy drinking or during withdrawal. Does anyone know whether patients with Parkinsonism have drunk more than their fellows?

Premarital tests for syphilis are still required by law in most of the United States of America (*American Journal of Public Health* 1981;**71**:155-9). In the District of Columbia out of nearly four million such tests only 453 were positive—a pick-up rate of one in 8500. Little wonder many States are seeking to repeal the law.

According to a book reviewer in "*Science*" (1981;**211**:810-1) about 95% of all French biologists are more or less against Darwinism. Two explanations are offered: the resistance of the French to ideas that are not homegrown and the virtual absence of non-French teachers in the universities. Countries which discourage the appointment of non-nationals in their universities risk intellectual as well as social isolation.

A young farm worker died suddenly while "mucking out" near a liquid manure storage tank (*Journal of the American Medical Association* 1981;**245**:63-5). Subsequent investigation showed that high concentrations of hydrogen sulphide had escaped from the tank because of overfilling and excessive agitation, and that this was not an isolated incident.

The Reagan administration has filled two top health posts—assistant and deputy secretary of health—with men described by "*Science*" (1981;**211**:907) as strongly opposed to federal funding of abortions. One of them, E Everett Koop, has been a leader in several antiabortion groups.

Two young children with trichobezoars were observed to be pulling out their hair and eating it (*Journal of Pediatrics* 1980;**97**:946-8). They were also found to have iron-deficiency anaemia, and it is suggested that some bezoars may result from a form of pica.

Further evidence that penicillin is of no practical use in speeding recovery from sore throat comes from a GP study reported in the "*Practitioner*" (1981;**225**:234-9). Doctors who claim a clinical ability to spot the patient with a bacterial sore throat who "needs" an antibiotic should think again.

Among the many unexplained associations between smoking and heart disease is the observation recently confirmed (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1981;**304**:465-8) that smokers with a high leucocyte count have an increased risk of myocardial infarction.

Births are creeping up again in Scotland. Two years ago, says the Registrar General, there were 895 fewer births than deaths; in the past 12 months the 62 328 deaths were well exceeded by 68 835 live births. Mrs Thatcher will, no doubt, be pleased at some sign of increased productivity north of the border.

MINERVA

# MEDICAL NEWS

## Growing older

"Care in the community must increasingly mean care by the community," says the White Paper *Growing Older*; and improving the lives of elderly people must be a task for the whole of society. Faster progress needs to be made, it says, in developing units for acute geriatric medicine alongside general acute departments, with facilities for active rehabilitation of elderly patients requiring further hospital care; beds for elderly patients recovering only slowly or unlikely to be discharged are best placed in small, local units. The procedures for discharging the elderly, especially those who live alone, points out the report, must take account of their problems; and volunteer schemes should be encouraged. It urges that many more psychiatrists with special training in the psychiatry of old age are needed to promote a progressive service. For this reason further senior registrar posts have been authorised. The White Paper emphasises the importance of the quality of life of elderly patients in hospital for long periods; to help all hospital staff increase their understanding of the needs of such patients the DHSS and NHS have produced a packet of guidance and learning materials. Similarly, the report points out that people living in residential accommodation, however frail they are, should be entitled to personal dignity, privacy, and freedom of choice—both a high calibre of staff and imaginatively designed accommodation can contribute to these things.

The White Paper also discusses such matters as income, retirement age and preparation for retirement, adult education, easing the problems of shopping and transport, community care and support schemes, and accommodation. More accessible information and guidance about the housing options and financial assistance available to the elderly would be helpful, points out the report. Mr Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for Social Services, expressed the hope that the report would help to produce a better understanding of what it means to get older and would stimulate thought and action. *Growing Older* (Cmd 8173) is published by HMSO, price £4.20, for the DHSS, Scottish Office, Welsh Office, and Northern Ireland Office.

## Amendment to data sheet on Debendox

Mr Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for Social Services, has recently stated in a letter to Mr Jack Ashley MP that the Committee on Safety of Medicines, although it has found no reason to alter its view that there is no scientifically acceptable evidence that Debendox causes harm to the fetus, has recommended that the data sheet on the drug should include a warning to doctors about its use. The manufacturer, Merrell, has accepted this and the Licensing Authority has agreed that the following statements should be included: "There have been a large number of epidemiological studies of Debendox. Although there have been some reports of congenital malformations associated with its administration in early pregnancy, a causal relationship has not been established. For no medicinal product can a small risk of teratogenic effect be excluded with absolute certainty and so the

use of any drug during early pregnancy should be avoided if at all possible."

## Problems of the deaf

A government survey suggests that the general public are more sensitive to the problems of the deaf than has usually been thought; nevertheless a substantial minority of those questioned (a random sample of 537) admitted reacting in a negative way towards deaf people. The survey, reported in *Public Attitudes to Deafness*, produced by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for the DHSS and published by HMSO (price £6.80), was commissioned by the DHSS after discussion with the Royal Institute for the Deaf, the British Deaf Association, the British Association for the Hard of Hearing, and the National Deaf Children's Society. All five bodies will now consider the results of the survey to decide what further action should be taken.

## COMING EVENTS

**Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh**—Colloquium for consultants and registrars on "Renal tumours," 17 March, Edinburgh. Details from the clerk of the college, Edinburgh EH8 9DW.

## SOCIETIES AND LECTURES

For attending lectures marked \* a fee is charged or a ticket is required. Applications should be made first to the institutions concerned.

### Monday, 16 March

**INSTITUTE OF DERMATOLOGY**—4.45 pm, Dr W Cunliffe: Pathogenesis of acne.

### Tuesday, 17 March

**GRAYLINGWELL HOSPITAL, CHICHESTER**—At St Richard's Hospital, 8.15 pm, inaugural Springfield lecture by Dr P Sainsbury: Depression—with an emphasis on research.

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**—At Christopher Ingold Laboratories, 5.30 pm, Freud memorial lectures in psychoanalysis by Professor C Lasch (New York): The transition from patriarchal authority to bureaucratic authority in Western Europe and America.

### Wednesday, 18 March

**BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION**—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, Wythenshawe, 1 pm, Mr T A H English: The challenge of heart transplantation.

**INSTITUTE OF ORTHOPAEDICS**—6 pm, Professor T Duckworth: Knock knees. 7 pm, Professor L Kessel: Tibia vara.

**NORTHWICH PARK HOSPITAL**—4.30 pm, Professor Attilio Maseri: Role and mechanism of coronary spasms in ischaemic heart disease.

**ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND**—3 pm, Frederic Hewitt lecture by Dr A E Cooper: Dead in space and time. 5 pm, Hunterian lecture by Professor R W L Hurt: Benign tumours of the bronchus and trachea.

### Thursday, 19 March

**BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION**—At Mackenzie Medical Centre, Burnley, 8.30 pm, Dr A R Lorimer: Assessment and investigation of patients with coronary artery disease.

**HONYMAN GILLESPIE LECTURE**—At Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, 5 pm, Dr M J Godman: Congenital heart disease—a problem for all ages.

**ROYAL SOCIETY OF TROPICAL MEDICINE AND HYGIENE**—At Porton Down, 3 pm, visit to PHLS Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research.\*

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**—At Christopher Ingold Laboratories, 5.30 pm, Freud memorial lecture in psychoanalysis by Professor C Lasch (New York): The transition from patriarchal authority to bureaucratic authority in Western Europe and America.

### Friday, 20 March

**BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION**—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, Lancaster, 8 pm, Dr D Verel: King James VI and the Eskimos—or how to avoid your coronary.

**UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL**—At Royal Liverpool Hospital, 5 pm, Mr M J Griffith: Epiphyseal injuries of the hip.

### Saturday, 21 March

**UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL**—At Royal Liverpool Hospital, 9 am, Mr J F Taylor: Leg length discrepancies—causes and management.

### Sunday, 22 March

**BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION**—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, South Trafford, 10 am, Dr M B Matthews: Is it really hypertension? Dr C L Bray: Sudden death.

## BMA NOTICES

### Central Meetings

MARCH  
18 Wed Negotiating Subcommittee (CCHMS), 10 am.  
19 Thurs General Medical Services Committee, 10 am.

APRIL  
1 Wed Council Executive, 10 am.  
2 Thurs General Purposes Subcommittee (GMSC), 10.30 am.

### Division Meetings

Members proposing to attend meetings marked \* are asked to notify in advance the honorary secretary concerned.

**Buckinghamshire**—At Princess Mary RAF Hospital, Wednesday, 18 March, 7.30 pm, annual meeting with Children Medical Society, speaker Group Captain R T M Jones: "Breast cancer."\* (Followed by buffet supper.)

**Bury**—At Bury Town Hall, Saturday, 21 March, 7 for 7.30 pm, annual dinner dance.\* (Guests invited.)

**Chesterfield**—At Station Hotel, Thursday, 19 March, 7.30 for 8 pm, Chairman's annual dinner.\* (Guests invited.)

**Darlington**—At Darlington Memorial Hospital, Wednesday, 18 March, 12-2.30 pm, pharmaceutical exhibition, light refreshments provided.

**Dewsbury**—At Harrop's Restaurant, Cleckheaton, Friday, 20 March, 8 for 8.30 pm, annual dinner. (Guests invited.)

**Ealing**—At Ealing Hospital, Tuesday, 17 March, 8.15 pm, Professor Harry Keen talking about the biosynthesis of human insulin using *E Coli*, joint meeting with Pharmaceutical Society. (Preceded by refreshments 7.30 pm.\*)

**East Yorkshire**—At Beverley Arms Hotel, Wednesday, 18 March, 8 pm, Mr P Gibson: "The stained glass of York Minster."\*

**Forth Valley**—At Bellsdyke Hospital, Larbert, Sunday, 22 March, 10.30 for 11 am, clinical symposium.\*

**Greenwich and Bexley**—At Greenwich District Hospital, Monday, 16 March, 8 pm, "Ocular entertainment."\* (Guests invited.)

**Isle of Wight**—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, Friday, 20 March, 8 pm, talk by Mr R Tremlett on sea fishing around the island. (Guests invited.)

**Lancaster**—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, Wednesday, 18 March, 8 pm, general meeting.

**Lewisham**—At Greenwich Theatre, Thursday, 19 March, 8 pm, "The golden age," followed by dinner.\*

**Northallerton**—At Motel Leeming, Leeming Bar, Friday, 20 March, 8 for 8.30 pm, annual dinner, speaker Dr R Adamson.\* (Guests invited.)

**Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire**—At Sinah Warren, Friday, 20 March, 8 pm, annual ball.\* (Guests invited.)

**Roehampton**—At Queen Mary's Hospital, Monday, 16 March, 7.30 for 8.15 pm, "Coverage of medical topics on television."\* (Buffet supper provided.)

**Salisbury**—At Salisbury General Infirmary, Wednesday, 18 March, 8 pm, Dr J D Dawson: "Medicine in isolated communities."\* (Preceded by buffet supper, 7.15 pm.\* Guests invited.)

**Scarborough**—At Scarborough Hospital, Thursday, 19 March, 8.30 pm, Mr William MacGregor talking on medicine as a whole in the United States.

**South Middlesex**—At the Jolly Gardeners, Isleworth, Monday, 16 March, 8 pm, Mr Joe Gormley speaking. (Preceded by supper at 7 pm.\* Guests are invited.)

**South Tyneside**—At South Shields General Hospital, Tuesday, 17 March, 8 pm, agm.

**South-west Wales**—At Ivy Bush Hotel, Carmarthen, Saturday, 14 March, 7 for 7.30 pm, annual dinner lecture, speaker Provost Herbert Duthie: "The future of medical education."\*

**Wigan**—At Bellingham Hotel and Institute, Tuesday, 17 March, 7 for 7.30 pm, invitation from British Dental Association to join their dinner and/or lecture. At Wigan Medical Institute, Thursday, 19 March, 7 for 8.15 pm, buffet supper and address by Mr Norman Ellis: "The changing functions of the Association."\* (All doctors invited.)

**Wigtown**—At Judge's Keep Hotel, Friday, 20 March, 7.30 for 8 pm, Dr M Maureen Roberts: "Breast screening."\*

### Regional Meeting

**Wessex Regional Group of Community Medicine**—At Odstock Hospital, Salisbury, Thursday, 19 March, 2 pm.

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