Survey of patient information booklets

P J M SLOAN

A wealth of written information is available for patients on the whole range of medical topics. The great variety of material available makes it difficult to choose the most appropriate card or booklet for the patient.

Pharmaceutical firms produce cards and booklets for patients of varying type and quality. This paper surveys the existing cards and booklets and categorises them as warning cards, cooperation cards, compliance cards, and educational booklets. It also discusses some of the uses and problems of educational booklets and compares booklets from all sources on the subject of heart disease. Finally, there is a list of educational non-promotional leaflets and booklets provided free of charge by pharmaceutical firms.

Information available to patients

WARNING CARDS

Warning cards are often included as package inserts informing the patient about the side effects of treatment. With certain drugs—for example, anticoagulants or steroids—small booklets are available. With all such cards it is difficult to strike a balance between thoroughness and brevity. Probably the most effective proposal is to list small numbers of common and serious side effects as a supplement to verbal warnings given by the prescribing doctor.¹

COOPERATION CARDS

The obstetrical cooperation card was the first of its type and was used to facilitate communication between obstetricians and general practitioners. Similar cards are now available for patients with disorders such as diabetes and hypertension. The cards should carry a list of the patient's current medications in addition to clinical and laboratory details. They help doctors when they see the patient and also may help the patient to become more concerned about their own medical care.²

COMPLIANCE CARDS

Compliance cards list the patients' medications, their dosage times, and information such as whether the tablets should be taken before or after meals with the aim of improving patient compliance. Patients who are poor compliers will probably not read the cards, so in these cases doctors can try to improve compliance by simplifying and rationalising the existing drug regimen.^{3 4}

EDUCATIONAL LEAFLETS AND BOOKLETS

The management of a patient's disease whether by surgery or drug treatment should always include explanation to the patient. Unfortunately, the patient may remember little of what he has been told. Comprehension, recall, and compliance

may be improved by written advice,^{5 6} though not all studies show this result.⁷

Many patient associations produce explanatory booklets, usually costing a small amount. National associations like the Family Planning Association and the Health Education Council produce excellent leaflets, often free. Sometimes doctors produce their own leaflets.⁸ In addition many pharmaceutical companies produce useful warning cards, compliance cards, cooperation cards, and educational material.

How can such information be dispensed to the patient? It is relatively easy in specialised units, as only a limited number of diseases are seen—for example, the coronary care unit, which provides leaflets on recovery from a heart attack or angina. In general practice, however, where many different problems are seen, dispensing information is more difficult. Verbal advice is reinforced best by material given personally to the patient by the doctor, but to achieve this he would need to have access to a vast number of booklets and leaflets. A more practical plan is to give the patient a "prescription" for a particular leaflet or booklet that could be obtained from the receptionist or health visitor, who would be in charge of stock.

Information on heart disease

Specific attention is devoted here to heart disease, as this probably offers the greatest opportunity for disseminating information. Information can play an important part in explaining angina to its sufferers, in helping a patient rehabilitate from a myocardial infarct, and, most ambitiously, in helping prevent heart disease. A list of titles and sources of the booklets on heart disease appears at the end of this paper.

There are four publications for sufferers from angina. *Living with Angina* (Bayer) is a short, useful aide mémoire for patients, which emphasises the main points; the photographs of the old angina sufferer, however, detract from the booklet's emphasis on exercise and training. Though the different types of antianginal tablets are not mentioned there are useful tips to improve compliance. *What is Angina* (British Heart Foundation) is a short outdated booklet. It has no illustrations and does not mention coronary artery spasm, the different types of tablets, or the place of surgery. An example of a good booklet is *Take Heart* (Stuart Pharmaceuticals), which is written in question and answer form and covers most points, including driving, sexual intercourse, and surgery. *Living with Angina* (The Chest, Heart, and Stroke Association) is the most thorough booklet, of which the only criticisms are the lack of illustrations and the fact that it costs 40p.

There are nearly a dozen booklets for patients recovering from a myocardial infarction and these can complement a doctor's advice very well, though all assume the patient has had an uncomplicated infarct, has no residual symptoms, and should be able to return to all previous activities. Apart from its title, *Counter Attack the Heart Attack* (Stuart Pharmaceuticals) is probably the best of the booklets produced by drug companies, though those from Bayer, Winthrop, and Leo are useful, if somewhat shorter. The booklet by the British Heart Foundation, *Back to Normal*, is much better than their booklet on angina and covers points like beta adrenoreceptor blockade after myocardial infarction and loss of licences for heavy goods vehicle drivers and airline pilots. *Heart Attack* (Family Doctor publication from the British Medical Association) would be suitable for well informed patients (including doctors themselves), as this booklet also covers prevention of atherosclerosis

and angina. I think, however, that it is too detailed for most patients, and it costs 60p. For patients in Scotland a brief, though thorough, booklet comes from the Scottish Health Education Group: *Advice for Those Recovering from a Heart Attack*. Three rather outdated publications come from The Chest, Heart, and Stroke Association, *Coronary After Care*, *Overcoming Your Coronary*, and *My Husband Had a Coronary*. This last takes the view of the spouse of a patient who has had a myocardial infarction and is supplemented by comments from other patients. It is more of interest to doctors to see how their actions are viewed rather than of use to patients. Some sections, indeed, are of historical interest only—for example, "Although I was feeling well . . . I learned I was doomed to spend the next three weeks or so in bed."

The remaining booklets cover preventive aspects of cardiovascular disease. The Health Education Council and Scottish Health Education Group have produced *Beating Heart Disease* in association with BBC radio. The layout is similar to that of a Sunday newspaper colour supplement and the scope is comprehensive. There is a useful section on first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation. It has sections on angina and myocardial infarction, however, and the booklet may appeal more to sufferers from heart disease than to younger people in whom primary prevention is the aim.

Five publications deal solely with the risk factors for atherosclerotic heart disease. *How Many Risks Do You Aim at Your Heart?* (MCP Pharmaceuticals), summarises the risks and how they can be reduced. *Looking After Your Heart* (ICI) is a glossy, trendy booklet. It has several good points including a list for further reading and useful addresses. Some people, however, may feel that the cartoons and general layout trivialise and detract from the aim of the booklet. *Reducing the Risk of a Coronary* (The Chest, Heart, and Stroke Association) costs a small amount and has a plain style of presentation compared with other booklets in this category. The Flora Project for Heart Disease Prevention produces two booklets in this section: *Henry the Heart's Health Hints* is childish but *Diet and the Prevention of Coronary Heart Disease* covers all points thoroughly and has some helpful diagrams and 80 references.

Useful booklets on specific risk factors for heart disease are available from The Flora Project for Heart Disease Prevention: *Dietary Fat and Food Cholesterol*, *Fitness and Exercise*, *Obesity*, and *Stress*. Further dietary advice comes from the Health Education Council: *Fat—Who Needs It?*

All the preventive booklets reviewed here are aimed at adults usually with established heart disease. Too few attempts are made to encourage teenagers, and parents on behalf of their children, to take measures to prevent heart disease. The primary prevention of heart disease thus remains a tantalising objective.

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- Hermann F, Herxheimer A, Lionel NDW. Package inserts for prescribed medicines: what minimum information do patients need? *Br Med J* 1978;ii:1132-5.
- Osbourne VL, Beevers DG. A comparison of hospital and general practice blood pressure readings using a shared-care record card. *J R Coll Gen Pract* 1981;31:345-50.
- Ettlinger PRA, Freeman GK. General practice compliance study: is it worth being a personal doctor? *Br Med J* 1981;282:1192-4.
- Zisner DK, Gillum RF, Johnson A, Becerrd J, Johnson TH. Improving hypertension control in a private medical practice. *Arch Intern Med* 1982;142:297-9.
- Ley P, Jain VK, Skilbeck EC. A method for decreasing patients' medication errors. *Psychol Med* 1976;6:599-601.
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- Laher M, O'Malley K, O'Brien E, O'Hanrahan M, O'Boyle C. Educational value of printed information for patients with hypertension. *Br Med J* 1981;282:1360-1.
- Seiler ER, Watson LM. Illness-specific cards—a feasibility study. *J R Coll Gen Pract* 1982;7:435-9.

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List of non-pharmaceutical sources of information about heart disease

British Heart Foundation, 102 Gloucester Place, London W1H 4DH.
The Chest, Heart and Stroke Association, Tavistock House North, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JE.

Family Doctor Publications, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP.

The Flora Project for Heart Disease Prevention, 25 North Row, London W1R 2BY.

The Health Education Council, 78 New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1AH.

Scottish Health Education Group, Health Education Centre, Woodburn House, Canaan Lane, Edinburgh EH10 4SG.

List of educational publications by medical category and alphabetical order of pharmaceutical company

Cardiovascular system

GENERAL LITERATURE

You and Your Water Tablets: reasons for and effects of diuretics, from Hoechst UK Ltd, Pharmaceutical Division, Hoechst House, Salisbury Road, Hounslow, Middx.

Looking After Your Heart: general advice and a few simple revisions of lifestyles from ICI Ltd, Alderley Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire.

How Many Risks Do You Aim at Your Heart?: advice on reducing risk factors from MCP Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Simpson Parkway, Kirkton Campus, Livingston, W Lothian.

ISCHAEMIC HEART DISEASE

Living With Angina and Leading a Normal Life After a Heart Attack, from Bayer UK Ltd, Haywards Heath, W Sussex.

Guidance for Those Who have Recently Suffered a Myocardial Infarction, from Leo Laboratories Ltd, Longwick Road, Princess Risborough, Aylesbury, Bucks.

Counter the Heart Attack, for patients who have suffered a heart attack, and *Take Heart*, for sufferers of angina, from Stuart Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Carr House, Carrs Road, Cheadle, Cheshire.

Coronary Thrombosis, for sufferers of a heart attack, from Winthrop Laboratories, Sterling Winthrop House, Surbiton, Surrey.

PROBLEMS OF THE LEGS

Why is Walking an Uphill Battle? for sufferers of intermittent claudication, from Brocades (Great Britain) Ltd, Brocades House, Pyrford Road, West Byfleet, Weybridge, Surrey.

Support for All in All Walks of Life, information about and advice on preventing varicose veins from Lastonet Products Ltd, Carn Brea, Redruth, Cornwall.

An Aid to Faster Recovery for Patients with Circulatory Disorders of the Leg from Lipha Pharmaceuticals Ltd, West Drayton, Middx.

The Good Foot Guide, advice and information on prevention and treatment of foot problems, and *The Scholl Guide to Better Legs*, information on prevention and treatment of varicose veins, from Scholl (UK) Ltd, 182-204 St John Street, London.

Advice for Patients with Peripheral Ischaemia, from Warner and Co, Usk Road, Pontypool, Gwent.

Notes for Patients with Arterial Insufficiency in the Limbs, from Winthrop Laboratories, Sterling Winthrop House, Surbiton, Surrey.

Venous Disorders: What You Can Do About Them, from Zyma (UK) Ltd, Hurdfield Industrial Estate, Macclesfield, Cheshire.

HYPERTENSION

Living With Hypertension, from Bayer UK Ltd, Haywards Heath, West Sussex.

Did You Take Your Blood Pressure Tablets Today?: general guidance notes from Ciba Laboratories, Horsham, West Sussex.

Advice for Patients with Hypertension, from Leo Laboratories Ltd, Longwick Road, Princess Risborough, Aylesbury, Bucks.

High Blood Pressure: general information from Merck Sharp and Dohme Ltd, Hertford Road, Hoddesdon, Herts.

Understanding Your Blood Pressure and Its Treatment, from Squibb, Squibb House, 141 Staines Road, Hounslow, Middx.

Down with Blood Pressure: general advice from Stuart Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Carr House, Carrs Road, Cheadle, Cheshire.

Living With Your Blood Pressure, from Wyeth Laboratories, Taplow, Maidenhead, Berks.

Gastrointestinal tract

DIETARY ADVICE

Losing Weight Depends on You, from Lipha Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Old Farm Road, West Drayton, Middx.

Weight-Reducing Diet, *Low Sodium Diet*, *High Fibre Diet*, *Low Saturated Fat Diet*, *Eating Your Way to a Long and Healthy Retirement*, dietary advice for the elderly, and *Eating for Health and Good Looks*, dietary advice for teenage girls from Smith Kline and French Laboratories Ltd, Mundrells, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

How to Cope with Food Allergies, from Warrick Pharmaceuticals, Mildenhall Industrial Estate, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

Various leaflets with dietary advice for patients with coeliac disease, renal failure, or phenylketonuria, from Welfare Foods (Stockport) Ltd, 63 London Road South, Poynton, Stockport, Cheshire.

ACIDITY PROBLEMS

Help Prevent Indigestion, from Beecham Research Labs, Brentford, Middx.

Hints for Heartburn Sufferers, from MCP Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Simpson Parkway, Kirkton Campus, Livingston, W Lothian.

Hiatus Hernia and Oesophagitis, from Winthrop Labs, Stirling Winthrop House, Surbiton, Surrey.

OSTOMY PROBLEMS

Ileostomy Care and *Colostomy Care*, from Coloplast Ltd, Orchard Lane, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire.

Some Helpful Advice on Living an Active Life with a Colostomy and *Some Helpful Advice on Living an Active Life with an Ileostomy*, from Downs Personal Products, Church Path, Mitcham, Surrey.

An Explanation of the Inner Workings Relative to Ileostomy, Colostomy and Ureterostomy, and *Ileostomists All*, from Salt and Son Ltd, 220 Corporation Street, Birmingham.

The Home Management of Colostomies and Ileostomies, from WB Pharmaceuticals Ltd, PO Box 23, Bracknell, Berks.

LOWER BOWEL PROBLEMS

Understanding Your Irritable Bowel, from Duphar Labs Ltd, Gaters Hill, West End, Southampton.

Ulcerative Colitis: Your Questions Answered, from Pharmacia (GB) Ltd, Prince Regent Road, Hounslow, Middx.

Eating More Fibre, from Reckitt and Colman Pharmaceutical Division, Dansom Lane, Hull.

Constipation: And How to Avoid It, from Winthrop Labs, Stirling Winthrop House, Surbiton, Surrey.

Diabetes

Cooperation Record Book for Diabetic Patients, with advice for diabetic patients, from Hoechst Pharmaceuticals, Hoechst House, Salisbury Road, Hounslow, Middx.

Rupert and His Friends, for young diabetics, and *An Introduction to Diabetes*, for young diabetics and their families, from Miles Laboratories Ltd, Stoke Court, Stoke Poges, Slough.

Insulin Dependent Diabetes: Explanations and Guidelines, a booklet, with *Injection and Mixing Techniques for Diabetics* and *Guidelines on Skin and Foot Care for Diabetics with Circulatory Disturbances in the Legs*, leaflets by Nordisk, 157-169 Walton Road, East Molesey, Surrey.

Keeping Well with Diabetes, a booklet for insulin dependent diabetics, and *Mixing Insulins*, a leaflet, from Novo Labs Ltd, Ringway House, Bell Road, Basingstoke, Hants.

Diabetic Diet, for mild or late onset diabetes, from Smith Kline and French Laboratories Ltd, Mundells, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

Mr John the Zookeeper, for children with diabetes, and *Living with Diabetes*, advice for diabetic patients taking insulin from Wellcome Division, The Wellcome Foundation Ltd, Crewe, Cheshire.

Infections and infestations

Recommendations for Patients Suffering from Cystitis, from Leo Laboratories Ltd, Longwick Road, Princes Risborough, Aylesbury, Bucks.

For Your Guidance, information about trichomoniasis from May and Baker Ltd, Rainham Road South, Dagenham, Essex.

The Truth About Head Lice, from Napp Laboratories Ltd, Cambridge Science Park, Milton Road, Cambridge.

All About Worms, information about threadworms and round worms from Reckitt and Colman, Dansom Lane, Hull, N Humberside.

German Measles and *Measles*: information about and advice for vaccination from Smith Kline and French Labs Ltd, Mundells, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

Some Information About Cystitis and How to Help Yourself to Avoid It, from Winthrop Labs, Stirling Winthrop House, Surbiton, Surrey.

Urinary tract

The Management of Urinary Incontinence and Some Helpful Advice on Living an Active Life with a Urostomy, from Downs Personal Products, Church Path, Mitcham, Surrey.

Home and Dry: a guide to urinary incontinence and its management in the adult from KabiVitrum Ltd, Riverside Way, Uxbridge, Middx.

Chest diseases and allergic disorders

NASAL DISORDERS

Wed You Dose is Blogged . . . Wad Should You Do?, for patients with nasal blockage, and *How to Cope with Upper Respiratory Allergies*, for patients with allergic rhinitis, from Warrick Pharmaceuticals, Mildenhall Industrial Estate, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

HAY FEVER

Action Against Hay Fever and Before the Pollen Starts to Count, from Bencard, Great West Road, Brentford, Middx.

Facts About Hay Fever and Other Allergies, from Dome/Hollister-Stier, Stoke Court, Stoke Poges, Slough, Berks.

How to Cope with Hay Fever, from Warrick Pharmaceuticals, Mildenhall Industrial Estate, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

THE HOUSE DUST MITE

The House Dust Mite and How to Control It, from Fisons Ltd, 12 Derby Road, Pharmaceutical Division, Loughborough, Leics.

Advice to Patients Allergic to House Dust and House Dust Mites, from Miles Laboratories, Dome/Hollister-Stier, Stoke Poges, Slough, Berks.

ASTHMA

Your Child and Asthma, from Astra Pharmaceuticals Ltd, 2 Bricket Road, St Albans, Herts.

A Patient's Guide to the Treatment of Asthma by Inhalation, from Fisons Ltd, Pharmaceutical Division, 12 Derby Road, Loughborough, Leics.

CHRONIC BRONCHITIS

How to Live with Your Chest, from Beecham Research Laboratories, Brentford, Middx.

Four Ways to Breathe More Easily, from Roche Products Ltd, PO Box 8, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

Neurological problems

MIGRAINE

Migraine information booklets and *Migraine: Fast Aid for Sufferers*, notes on treatment, from Miles Laboratories Ltd, Stoke Court, Stoke Poges, Slough.

Understanding Your Migraine, from Wander Pharmaceuticals, 98 The Centre, Feltham, Middx.

STROKES AND IMMOBILITY

You Can Do It, recovery advice for relatives of and sufferers from a stroke, from Ciba Laboratories, Horsham, West Sussex.

Hints on Rehabilitation at Home and *Hints on Physiotherapy*, for stroke patients, from Eaton Laboratories, The Broadway, Woking, Surrey.

Advice on the Care of the Immobile, from Tosara Products (UK) Ltd, 59 Crosby Road North, Liverpool.

Stroke Patients: Leaflet for Patients and their Relatives, from Winthrop Laboratories, Sterling Winthrop House, Surbiton, Surrey.

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Exercises for Patients with Parkinson's Disease, from Roche Products Ltd, PO Box 8, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

PHYSICAL DISABLEMENT

Able to Grow Up, for young physically disabled people, from Downs Personal Products, Church Path, Mitcham, Surrey.

Orthopaedics and rheumatology

Information for the Patients: Paget's Disease of Bone, from Brocades (GB) Ltd, Brocades House, West Byfleet, Surrey.

A Guide to Understanding Low Back Pain and Practical Advice for Back Sufferers, from Geigy Pharmaceuticals, Ciba Laboratories, Horsham, W Sussex.

Arthritis and You . . . Answers to Some Common Questions covers osteo- and rheumatoid arthritis, from Lederle Labs, Fareham Road, Gosport, Hants.

Advice for Patients Suffering from Low Back Pain, from Parke, Davis and Co, Usk Road, Pontypool, Gwent.

Paediatric problems

GENERAL

Baby on the Way, general information about early problems to be encountered with a baby, *And Baby Makes Four*, information about second babies, and *Tinies on the Move*, which concerns the problems of taking babies on journeys, from Robinsons of Chesterfield, Wheat Bridge, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

It's Your Baby Too, advice for fathers, from Wyeth Laboratories, Taplow, Maidenhead, Berks.

FEEDING

From Cradle Days to Family Meals, a booklet guide to feeding a baby during the first year, from Cow and Gate Ltd, Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

Breast Feeding Your Baby and *Bottle Feeding Your Baby*, from Wyeth Laboratories, Taplow, Maidenhead, Berks.

SKIN PROBLEMS

Taking Care of Your Baby's Skin, a general booklet, and *Nappy Rash—A Guide to Successful Treatment*, from Dome Laboratories, Stoke Court, Stoke Poges, Slough.

How Can You Help Prevent Nappy Rash?, from Lloyd-Mamot Ltd, Reckitt and Colman Pharmaceutical Division, Dansom Lane, Hull.

Nappies—the Caring Way, from Robinsons of Chesterfield, Wheat Bridge, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

Obstetric problems

Posture During Pregnancy and Post-Natal Exercises, from Cow and Gate Ltd, Trowbridge, Wilts.

Periods After Pregnancy, from Robinsons of Chesterfield, Wheat Bridge, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

Healthy, Happy Eating During Pregnancy, from Smith Kline and French Labs Ltd, Mundells, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

Gynaecological problems

The Menopause, from Ayerst Laboratories Ltd, South Way, Andover, Hants.

Premenstrual Syndrome, from Duphar Laboratories, Gaters Hill, West End, Southampton.

Your First Period, Periods Without Problems, Premenstrual Tension, and The Menopause, from Robinsons of Chesterfield, Wheat Bridge, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

What the Menopause Means, from Sandoz Ltd, 98 The Centre, Feltham Middx.

Ophthalmology problems

Glaucoma and You, from Alcon Laboratories Ltd, Imperial Way, Watford, Herts.

Glaucoma: What You Can Do About It, from Merck Sharp and Dohme Ltd, Hoddesdon, Herts.

Understanding Your Glaucoma, from Smith and Nephew Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Welwyn Gargen City, Herts.

Understanding Cataract, from Smith and Nephew Ltd, Bampton Road, Romford, Essex.

Oncology

A Patient's Guide to Hodgkin's Disease, A Parent's Guide to Leukaemias, and A Patient's Guide to Radiotherapy, from Eli Lilly and Co Ltd, Basingstoke, Hants.

The Lymphomas: A Guide for Patients and Chemotherapy: Your Questions Answered, from Farmitalia Carlo Erba Ltd, Kingmaker House, Station Road, Barnet, Herts.

Contraception

For the Attention of Father, contraceptive advice for new fathers, from Lamberts (Dalston) Ltd, 200 Queensbridge Road, London.

Birth Control: A Brief Guide to Birth Control Methods, from Ortho Pharmaceutical Ltd, Saunderton, High Wycombe, Bucks.

Copper IUCDs, information from Searle Pharmaceuticals, PO Box 53, Lane End Road, High Wycombe, Bucks.

Family Planning, notes on all methods in Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarathi, Bengdi, and Cantonese, from Wyeth Laboratories, Taylor, Maidenhead, Berks.

Psychiatry

Why Worry, explanation and advice for sufferers of anxiety neurosis, from Beecham Research Laboratories, Brentford, Middx.

What Is Depression and What Can Be Done to Help Overcome It?, from Bencard, Great West Road, Brentford, Middx.

Dermatology

ACNE

Instructions for Patients with Acne, from Leo Labs Ltd, Longwick Road, Princes Risborough, Aylesbury, Bucks.

Your Acne, from Quinoderm Ltd, Manchester Road, Oldham, Lancs.

ALLERGIES

How to Cope with Skin Allergies, from Warrick Pharmaceuticals, Mildenhall Industrial Estate, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

PLANTAR WARTS

Posalfin, *Treatment for Plantar Warts*, information and instructions on use from Norgine Ltd, High Holborn, London.

Duofilm Patient Instruction Sheets, information and instructions on use, from Stiefel Laboratories (UK) Ltd, 10 Wellcroft Road, Slough.

Haematology

ANTICOAGULATION

Handbooks for Patients Taking Anticoagulants, from Duncan Flockhart and Co Ltd, 700 Oldfield Road North, Greenford, Middx.

Anticoagulant Therapy: Warfarin Patients' Guide, from WB Pharmaceuticals Ltd, PO Box 23, Bracknell, Berkshire.

Dentistry

Oral Hygiene: Correct Denture Care, Oral Hygiene: Brushing Teeth Correctly, Oral Hygiene: Flossing Teeth Correctly, and Oral Hygiene: Caring for Your Child's First Teeth, from Cooper Health Products Ltd, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Bucks.

Gingivitis, from ICI Pharmaceutical Division, Alderley House, Alderley Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire.

Time for a Change, about choosing a toothbrush, from Stafford-Millar Ltd, Hatfield, Herts.

Indian reflections: fleeting enchantment

It required a good deal of persuasion on my part to make the prisoner who was escorted by two constables part with his child. The prisoner was facing a charge of murder of his wife—the mother of the child. I had to tell him that the child was very ill and needed prolonged treatment and care which he was in no position to provide. But he would not listen. "How will the child remain alone in the hospital without anyone to look after his needs?" he asked. His justifiable fears had to be allayed. With reluctance he placed the infant in the arms of the waiting nurse and left hesitatingly, being led away by his escorts. Thus Nathu, son of Ladu Ram, an ill, emaciated, and motherless infant became our charge. I must admit that it was not without trepidation that the responsibility was accepted.

A year has passed since. He has had many ups and downs but they are now things of the past. Nathu has acquired a new name, many presents, and, what is more, found a place in the hearts of all those who have cared for him. The attendants of other children always have a kind word to say or a sweet to offer him. He is being picked up, pampered, and fed. To me it appears in the wake of the loss of his mother he has found many new mothers. He is no longer an emaciated, helpless infant crying feebly in a cradle in the corner of a ward. You will find him running after a ball, playing hide and seek, or chasing children of his size in the ward or corridor. To the sister of the ward he is now Rajiv and the apple of her eye. At her bidding he will say his name is "Aji" also waft kisses and wave "bye bye." To me he is the mascot of the ward, energetically pushing the trolley on my rounds—in different directions sometimes—or enjoying a ride on it with an impish smile on his face. He has a fancy for the stethoscope and goes for it whenever he gets a chance. I must confess I rather miss him when he is not around. There is one thing Rajiv hates and that is having a bath and one thing he loves is a lot of "Casilan" in his milk. If you hear him making loud vocal protests you may be certain that he is being given a bath willy nilly or probably enough Casilan has not been added to his milk.

Nathu alias Rajiv, though not particularly beautiful, is healthy and full of joie de vivre. He has not a care in the world but we have for him. So far none of his next of kin has come to take him home or even cared to visit him. He has thrived but cannot be allowed to grow up in the midst of the suffering and sickness of a hospital ward. He will have to be sent to an institution meant for such unfortunate cases. The sister of the ward hides a tear every time the question arises of sending Rajiv away. I do not know what she will do when that day comes. Probably I shall have to again be a witness to a

parting scene similar to that of a year ago. But with a difference. How will Rajiv take it? He is old enough to feel it. I also feel involved. Will he get Casilan in his milk on demand in his new home? I do wish that when he leaves he will soon forget his brief existence with us and is happy in his new home.

I hate to think otherwise.—S K MAJUMDAR, director, HHRD Medical Trust, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

Can attacks of gout be prevented by a change in diet?

Yes. Attacks of gout occur when localised deposits of crystalline uric acid become "unstable." Diet can moderate both the extent of the deposits and their liability to become "unstable." Many gouty patients are overweight. In most of these a reduction of weight is accompanied by a fall in the serum uric acid concentration and the urinary urate excretion, which should be advantageous. For example, a mean fall in body weight of 7 kg was accompanied by a mean fall in serum uric acid of 0.7 mg/100 ml (40 μ mol/l). "Crash diets," however, may precipitate attacks, probably through an associated lactic acidosis. Acute excess may lead to transient hyperuricaemia, largely owing to hyperlactacidaemia and the resulting competitive inhibition of tubular excretion of urate. This may precipitate an acute attack. Chronic excessive consumption may also stimulate production of purine and consequent increase in the production and deposition of uric acid. Beer in particular seems to add to the purine concentration. Reduction in the regular intake of foods containing purine will lessen the demands on uricosuric drugs and allopurinol. Strict avoidance of purines can lead to a fall in serum urate concentrations of 60-120 μ mol/l (1-2 mg/100 ml).

Some subjects seem to have an idiosyncrasy and are liable to attacks after particular forms of food, especially high purine or alcoholic beverages, notably heavy wines. Clearly these should be avoided. The predisposition to gout is often hereditary. The ease with which the superficial aspects of the metabolic disorder can be corrected by drugs has led to their widespread use. It is preferable to restrict their use to patients in whom correction of underlying contributing factors cannot be achieved.—J MATHEWS, consultant physician (rheumatology), London.

Scott JT. Food drink, and gout. *Br Med J* 1983;287:78-9.