only form of uterine stimulation that I allow. If low amniotomy alone fails to effect full cervical dilatation in a reasonable time my reaction is to regard the problem as essentially one of a mechanical impediment to adequate progress in labour, to eschew the use of oxytocics, and generally to advise caesarean section regardless of the apparent strength of the uterine contractions or one's impression of the relative dimensions of the presenting fetal part and the maternal pelvis.

The fact that only 36 of Mr. Studd and his colleagues' 50 multigravidae had spontaneous deliveries suggests that inertia may not always have been the only reason for the delay in cervical dilatation. Furthermore, the particularly high instrumental delivery rate in unstimulated labours may not have been so much the "penalty of non-stimulation," as suggested by the authors, as a vindication of the wisdom of those managing the patients in their withholding of oxytocic stimulation in a potentially dangerous situation. In the past seven years I have encountered three cases of uterine rupture following the administration of oxytocics to improve contractions in multigravidae thought to have been suffering from simple uterine inertia.

Friedman's partogram¹ was valuable in that it distinguished the different phases of the first stage of labour. The routine use of graphic recording of cervical dilatation on some sort of nomogram seems to me a limited and tedious way of diagnosing delay in labour which can be recognized more simply and comprehensively by reference to an easy-to-remember table.² If graphic recording, by placing too much emphasis upon a standard rate of cervical dilatation, leads to the unnecessary and potentially dangerous use of oxytocic stimulation it may prove less than a major advance in modern obstetrics. —I am, etc.,

D. D. MATHEWS

This isolate was not available for serotyping. At birth the child weighed 1940 g. The duration of labour was 12 hours.

The third infant was noted to be limp, with shallow breathing, five hours after birth and by 12 hours had deteriorated markedly, with tachypnoea and cyanosis. At this time throat swab, blood, and C.S.F. were taken and benzylpenicillin and gentamicin were started. By 19 hours there was evidence of clinical improvement. A group B streptococcus, serotype Ia, was isolated from throat swab and blood. At discharge, aged 18 days, the baby was considered to be normal. This infant weighed 2740 g and labour lasted five hours.

The three cases occurred within a few days of each other, but serotyping demonstrated this clustering to be fortuitous. It is of interest to note that the case of late-onset meningitis was due to serotype III, which is in accord with other reported cases in the literature.¹ The source of infection and the reason for the delayed onset of meningitis remain obscure. In our case the baby was healthy, of normal weight at birth, and had been at home for seven days. Serotype I (a and b) is said to be the most pathogenic subtype in the immediate neonatal period. Of our two babies who became ill soon after birth, the one infected with serotype II died, while the one with respiratory distress due to serotype Ia survived. Though only the latter was treated, the former died less than eight hours after delivery, possibly too rapidly for therapy to have had effect.

Since 1967 there have been 13 other cases of group B streptococcal infection of early onset in this hospital. Eleven of these babies died. None had evidence of meningitis. We would like to endorse Dr. Reid's view that the group B streptococcus is an important pathogen in the neonatal period.—We are, etc.,

ANNE H. C. UTTLEY
RUTH S. MITCHISON

Department of Bacteriology,
Royal Postgraduate Medical School,
London W.12

¹ Friedman, E. A., *Labor. Clinical Evaluation and Management*. New York, Meredith, 1967.

² Mathews, D. D., *British Medical Journal*, 1972, 4, 487.

Group B Streptococci in Perinatal Infections

SIR,—We note with interest Dr. T. M. S. Reid's article (7 June, p. 533). We have recent experience of three severe perinatal infections due to group B streptococci. The infants were born by spontaneous vertex delivery, labour having been induced in each case by artificial rupture of the membranes.

The first infant was readmitted to this hospital, aged 10 days, with a history of sudden onset of grunting respiration and tachypnoea and was moribund two hours later. A group B streptococcus, serotype III, was isolated from cerebrospinal fluid and blood cultures. Though benzylpenicillin was administered promptly after microscopic examination of the C.S.F. deposit, the baby died 22 hours after the onset of symptoms. At birth the infant had been healthy and weighed 3400 g following a short labour—approximately four hours. No group B streptococci were isolated from nose, throat, or high vaginal swabs taken from the mother after the child's death.

The second infant suffered respiratory distress within an hour of birth and died seven hours later. At post-mortem there was bilateral pulmonary consolidation, and a group B streptococcus, serotype II, was isolated from blood culture. A group B streptococcus was also isolated from the mother's high vaginal swab taken three days after delivery.

Agency Nurses

SIR,—For the first time in the history of the Health Service a Secretary of State is prepared to risk the welfare of patients in order to achieve an administrative objective—an objective, moreover, which is neither realistic nor economical. In a circular addressed to regional and area health authorities and boards of governors she is calling for the elimination of the use of agency nurses from the N.H.S., though she acknowledges the value of the contribution made by agency nurses and in spite of the fact that she "appreciates that a short term risk may have to be accepted in order to achieve the longer term aim of a more stable nursing force."

Even if her objective were likely to be achieved by such elimination this could not justify "short term risk" to patients. The fact is, however, that the elimination of agency nurses would inflict long-term harm on the N.H.S. There are two factors which seem to be completely ignored by the Secretary of State: (1) It will be no cheaper to run the Health Service without agency nurses. This has been admitted time and time again in answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in successive

Governments.¹⁻³ (2) If agency nurses cannot nurse through their agencies, over half will leave nursing completely. This fact was established by a survey⁴ carried out by this organization in 1974 and reflects the views of the agency nurses themselves.

Lastly, the Secretary of State suggests that, while it is wrong to use nurses from agencies, it is quite proper to use nurses from nurses' banks set up by the hospitals themselves. All the alleged inconveniences of agency nursing are equally present with nurses supplied by nurses' banks and the only difference between the two systems is that one is operated by nurses in private enterprise whereas the other is operated by nurses in public service. Nurses' agencies have no quarrel with nurses' banks but see any widespread extension of this system as an inefficient method of replacing the services that agencies already offer.

My purpose in writing this letter to you is to alert your readers to the fact that a Secretary of State is prepared to allow N.H.S. patients to suffer rather than accept a system of private enterprise which is controlled by law and which has worked satisfactorily for many years.—I am, etc.,

DONALD J. CROPPER
Secretary-General,
Federation of Personnel Services of
Great Britain Ltd.

London W.1

¹ Hansard, House of Commons, 17 November 1969, Written Answers, col. 197.

² Hansard, House of Commons, 23 November 1971, Written Answers, col. 315.

³ Hansard, House of Commons, 19 February 1975, Written Answers, col. 392.

⁴ Federation of Personnel Services of Great Britain Ltd. *The Temporary Nurse: An Investigation into the Reasons Why Nurses Do Temporary Work and a Report on Their Attitudes to Their Profession*. London, F.P.S.G.B., 1974.

Anabolic Steroids in Athletics

SIR,—Dr. D. L. J. Freed and others (31 May, p. 471) showed that performance improved significantly (range 0-15%) among weightlifters taking anabolic steroids; their body weights also rose by about 3 kg.

In weightlifting nine weight classes are defined, and the contestants take care to keep their weight just within the permissible maximum (except the 111 + kg group). If steroids increase body weight the contestants would have to compete in the heavier weight groups. The figure shows the increase in the weightlifting capability in the heavier weight groupings. The gain in performance attributable to steroids has to be matched with the initial weight and the weight gains; for the same weight gain the lighter weights have to perform far better than the heavier weights.

The ethical considerations as to the use of anabolic steroids and the question of athletes using steroids to gain an unfair advantage need reviewing. The real advantage of using anabolic steroids from a performance point of view lies in the throwing (discus, hammer, shot) and rowing events. The javelin throw involves an initial run and the extra weight will be a handicap to the thrower. The throwing and rowing events are contested among the tall, where even the six-footer (183 cm) is short (range of eight finalists in shotput, Munich Olympics 1972, 186-202 cm; range of winning rowing team, 183-196 cm (excepting coxswain who was of average height, 175 cm)). A tall competitor has two

Body Weight and Performance in Weightlifting Events (Munich Olympic Medalists, 1972).

advantages: greater weight because of his height and greater leverage. The sporting system is biased in favour of the taller sections of the population; persons of average height, no matter how good they are within the physical limitation of their build, are virtually debarran from some events.^{1,2} Probably shorter competitors in the throwing and rowing events are tempted to use steroids to gain in weight what they lack in height. But they cannot match the advantages taller competitors (of the same weight) have because of better leverage. There is need to emphasize that the use of anabolic steroids will not help to win medals in a large majority of cases. I suggest the administrators of athletics re-examine some of the basic assumptions upon which these events are regulated.—I am etc.,

T. KHOSLA

Department of Medical Statistics,
Welsh National School of Medicine,
Cardiff

- ¹ Khosla, T., *British Medical Journal*, 1968, 4, 111.
² Khosla, T., *British Journal of Preventive and Social Medicine*, 1971, 25, 114.

Moles and Malignant Melanoma

SIR,—Your leading article "Of Moles and Malignancy" (19 April, p. 106) contains many statements of opinion, and not one single reference of support is quoted. You make the following statement: "The moles that are under the greatest suspicion are those that show the most intense and prolonged junctional activity. . . . Moles on the hands, feet, and genitalia often fall into this category, and they have a sinister reputation, so that the mere existence of moles on these sites is an indication for their removal." How many malignant melanomas have actually been seen arising in pre-existing junctional naevi of the palms and soles? Since there are melanocytes present a malignant melanoma can arise there, but they must be very few and far between. I personally have never seen a malignant melanoma arising in such a site.

In a clearly written and authoritative opinion based on their own studies and those of others Clark and Mihm¹ state: "We do not believe that moles have any formal

histogenetic relation to malignant melanoma, and, when malignant melanoma does arise from a mole, it does not differ in any way from malignant melanomas arising from the general epidermal melanocytic system; hence, in our view, moles are not pre-malignant lesions, and removal of these pigmented sites for prophylaxis is not justified."

The data of Allyn *et al.*² indicated that every sixth person has at least one pigmented naevus on a palm or sole. Can you imagine the mass surgery needed to heed your opinion? Surgeons would be busy doing nothing else, and as naevi continue to arise during life repeated surgery would be necessary, eventually causing a new iatrogenic disease entity—the battered hand syndrome.—I am, etc.,

WALTER GORDON

Department of Dermatology,
Groote Schuur Hospital and University of Cape Town,
Cape Town

- ¹ Clark, W. H., and Mihm, M. C., in *Moles and Malignant Melanoma: Dermatology in General Medicine*, ed. T. B. Fitzpatrick *et al.*, p. 491. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971.
² Allyn, B., *et al.*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1963, 186, 890.

.* There is no doubt that malignant melanomas can arise in moles, including those on the palms and soles. How often this occurs is hard to say, because one has to rely so heavily on the patient's account of what happened. The advice to remove moles from the palms, soles, and genitalia is the policy of a group, not a personal foible. If it is agreed that moles contain concentrations of melanocytes and that the melanocytes are usually very active in moles of these situations, there is no need to postulate any mysterious tendency of moles to become malignant per se to make their prophylactic removal a reasonable procedure.—Ed., *B.M.J.*

SI Units

SIR,—I write in support of Dr. J. C. B. Fenton's letter (28 June, p. 751) on the subject of SI units. Of particular importance is the question whether clinical staff are prepared to accept this new system, and he is so right when he says that in few instances have their opinions been sought. He is equally right when he feels that many of us in our pathology laboratories have not had our opinions sought either.

For your information, it is interesting to note that in many hospitals in East Anglia the opinion of clinical staff has been sought either through established committee structures or on an individual basis, and so far I have heard no "clinical" voice raised in appreciation of the SI. In fact there is a great deal of hostility and now a number of firm resolutions from clinical staff stating that they do not wish the change to take place. In such a situation it makes the job of a chemical pathologist very difficult, since it would be a foolish man who tried to push an unacceptable change of terminology into a hospital where clinical colleagues did not wish this type of reporting made.

As a final challenge I would ask you to offer the courtesy of your correspondence columns in the weeks to come to any clinician who can present a reasoned case as to why he has or might find SI units bene-

ficial in the immediate care of his patients.—I am, etc.,

MICHAEL WALSH

Department of Clinical Chemistry,
Peterborough District Hospital,
Peterborough

SIR,—Though a whole-hearted supporter of internationally agreed terminology, I have some sympathy with those who are worried about the confusion that is going to be caused by the substitution of certain SI units for familiar terms which everyone understands. They probably feel that the object of changing terminology in science should be to facilitate communications and not simply to bring about change for its own sake.

Those who are worried about this may take some comfort from the fact that their feelings are not new, and perhaps one of the best expressions of them is to be found in the Preface, written in the year 1661, to the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Common experience sheweth, that where a change hath been made of things advisedly established (no evident necessity so requiring) sundry inconveniences have thereupon ensued; and those many times more and greater than the evils, that were intended to be remedied by such change."—I am etc.,

D. H. SMYTH

University Department of Psychiatry,
Middlewood Hospital, Sheffield

Spontaneous Pneumothorax

SIR,—Following your leading article on the management of pneumothorax (7 June, p. 526). I wish to draw attention to the fact that the Heimlich flutter valve is no longer imported into this country, nor is there any British-made substitute for this invaluable device. The British distributors have been unable to find any reason for this. Perhaps you or your readers may be able to shed some light on this.—I am, etc.,

N. MIZRAHI

Oldchurch Hospital,
Romford, Essex

Colour Disturbance as a Symptom

SIR,—As your leading article (5 April, p. 2) points out, approximately one male in 12 has defective red-green colour vision.

This handicap is a bar to a number of occupations—for example, employment in the Forces, in the operational fire services, or as an art teacher. Over the past year I have seen two applicants for training as art teachers who have had defective colour vision (they may become Michelangelos).

It would be of interest to know how this condition affects one in 12 of males working in other occupations—doctors, analytical chemists, pathologists, electricians, public health inspectors, etc. Any person in fact who may have to undertake titration or colorimetric testing on blood, urine (Hemacombistix), or public water supplies; or who may have to distinguish between colours in the electrical and television services.—I am, etc.,

M. J. PLEYDELL

Oxford Area Health Authority (Teaching),
Health Offices,
Oxford