flotation aid is worn around the ankle; approximately one and a half times the neoprene of one knee support would be required to correct flotation. Neoprene boots support twice the weight of a knee replacement and so would correct flotation (with the added benefit of verruca protection).

Patients wishing to swim after knee replacement surgery should be warned that the weight of the prosthesis will affect their flotation, and they should take care when first attempting to swim. If swimming is difficult then flotation aids such as neoprene supports or boots may be beneficial.

Convulsions at Christmas

Stephen Kirker

Long hours spent behind the scenes

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That sleep deprivation exacerbates the frequency of seizures in patients with spontaneous epileptic fits is well known, but there are few reports of patients who have seizures only after sleep deprivation.^{1,2}

Case report

A healthy 26 year old butcher described convulsions without warning or focal onset between 11 am and noon on Christmas Eve in 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, and 1991. He had no other convulsions or episodic symptoms that could be epileptic in origin and he had no relevant medical history. His usual working day was from 7 am to 6 pm but for the 14 days before Christmas he worked until at least 10 pm and as late as 1 am, seven days a week. He worked all through the night of 23 December. He did not miss any meals and ate through the night as well. His usual alcohol consumption was 35 units a week but he drank less during these weeks.

Results of examination and computed tomography were normal. Electroencephalograms in 1989 and 1992, each three months after the period of sleep deprivation, showed paroxysmal generalised spike and wave activity at 8 Hz, with a normal background rhythm. The patient was not prepared to change his working hours during the busiest time of year so we prescribed phenytoin over the second half of December. His gradual reduction in alcohol consump-

tion during this period was unlikely to precipitate withdrawal seizures, and he did not have symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. His electroencephalogram suggested he had an underlying tendency to have seizures, which only became apparent when his "seizure threshold" was lowered by sleep deprivation.

Comment

Gunderson *et al* reported 40 servicemen who had seizures after sleep deprivation (more than 36 hours in 70%), six of whom had had a previous convulsion in similar circumstances.¹ Two had paroxysmal diffuse sharp waves and four had minor abnormalities in their electroencephalograms after one or more nights' sleep. Bennett described four airmen who had single convulsions after sleep deprivation accumulated over several nights.² Three had generalised spike and wave discharges after photic stimulation or sleep induced by seconal.

Seizures may occur in previously healthy people after work related sleep deprivation and may therefore be a form of occupational illness, and they may lead to the major occupational handicap of loss of a driving licence.

1 Gunderson CH, Dunne PB, Feyer TL. Sleep deprivation seizures. *Neurology* 1973;23:678.

2 Bennett DR. Sleep deprivation and major motor convulsions. *Neurology* 1963;13:953.

Word perfect

David Maxwell

Although few of these medical terms may form part of the everyday vocabulary of today's physician, many of them describe objects, events, or conditions that are commonplace. The correct answers and their derivations are given on p 1586.

- (1) **Emunction:** (a) nose-picking (b) chewing the cud (c) a poultice
- (2) **Mitella:** (a) a baby bed bug (b) an arm sling (c) a sesamoid bone in the wrist
- (3) **Incubus:** (a) a nightmare (b) an apprentice surgeon (c) in the prone position
- (4) **Gravedo:** (a) pregnancy (b) midthoracic back pain (c) a cold
- (5) **Acnestis:** (a) area on the back that is difficult to scratch (b) status acne (c) the peak of a febrile illness
- (6) **Whirlbone:** (a) the patella (b) Pagetoid bone (c) a dental instrument
- (7) **Pandiculation:** (a) inability to make up one's mind (b) speaking in many languages (c) yawning
- (8) **Ciliosis:** (a) trembling of the eyelid (b) playing constantly with one's hair (c) swaying gait
- (9) **Bechic:** (a) a patient with thromboangiitis obliterans (b) cough medicine (c) a Russian homoeopathic practitioner
- (10) **Brontophobia:** (a) fear of large animals (b) fear of one's sisters (c) fear of thunder
- (11) **Bumble foot:** (a) gait of one with congenital dislocation of the hips (b) a foot disease of poultry (c) a foot with six toes
- (12) **Dewlap:** (a) pendulous loose skin of the throat (b) beads of sweat on one with a high fever (c) uraemic frost

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