there must be some means of organizing refresher courses, seminars, etc., but it must not be allowed to dictate terms of entry to practice.—I am, etc.,

J. MILLER AITKEN

Dundee

British Academy of Psychopharmacology

Sr,—The Collegium Internationale Neuro-Psychopharmacologicum (C.I.N.P.) was founded at the second World Congress of Psychiatry in Copenhagen in 1957. At that time it was aimed for the future close collaboration between the C.I.N.P. and all national associations is close and effective. Therefore I have pleasure in congratulating this newly established academy on behalf of the C.I.N.P. Executive Committee, and in wishing them all the best for their future development. The C.I.N.P., as an international organization, will promote with emphasis the future work of the British Academy of Psychopharmacology.—I am, etc.,

H. HIPPUS

University Psychiatric Hospital, Munich

Epidemic Neumyasthenia

Sr,—The finding of abnormal lymphocytes in some of the patients affected by epidemic neuromyasthenia (E.N.) in the Great Ormond Street epidemic (23 February, p. 301) is reminiscent of the Dallaston (Cumberland) epidemic in 1955, in which atypical lymphocytes were found in 30% of the patients and could be detected for as long as 18 months after the onset of the illness. This suggests that the prolonged convalescence in some cases is due to persistent smouldering of an infective process.

In a previous communication1 I have drawn attention to the peculiar association of E.N. with polyneuritis. E.N. appears to alter the normal epidemiological pattern of polyneuritis. In 1955 the spread of an extensive type-1 polyneuritis epidemic around the coast of Iceland was blocked by the appearance of a concurrent epidemic of E.N. in two towns and also in a district (Akureyri) in which there had been a severe epidemic of E.N. a few years previously. Children in one of the towns affected by E.N. showed unexpected antibody responses to poliomyelitis vaccination the following year.2

The case incidence of both the Dalston1 and Iceland3 types of E.N. shows an almost equal sex ratio, with male predominance in some of the children's age groups, suggesting an infective, non-hysterical aetiology.

A new clinical entity, subacute myelo-neuropathy (S.M.N.), which appeared in Japan over 10 years ago, has certain features in common with outbreaks of E.N. in other parts of the world. Controversy has existed as to whether the condition is caused by a virus infection or by the use of chloroquin for the treatment of diarrhoea. Both agents have been shown to produce similar neuromyasthenic lesions and, when combined, appear to produce a severe neuro-myelitis in older children. In a mortality rate of up to 5%. I have watched the Japanese investigations with interest since a virus was isolated from patients suffering from S.M.O.N. which inhibited the growth of E.N. virions. This effect was neutralized by serum from one of these patients. Then Inoue et al.4 reported the isolation of a virus, from which they prepared an antiserum which neutralized the C.P.E. (incomplete cytopathic effect) produced by other viruses from the stools and also the C.P.E. produced by all viruses isolated from the spinal fluid of S.M.O.N. patients. They considered that the low neutralizing antibody titre in the serum of S.M.O.N. patients might explain the subsidence and relapsing course of the disease.

It was most unfortunate that the attempt to isolate the virus from the Great Ormond Street patients by Dr. M. L. Davies and his colleagues was frustrated by a mechanical breakdown during a vital stage of the isolation procedure. However, until it is known whether Inoue's virus can be neutralized by serum with E.N. it would be wise to avoid the use of chloroquin for diarrhoea in patients presenting with features of this syndrome.—I am, etc.,

J. GORDON PARISH

Department of Rheumatology and Rehabilitation, St. Mary's Hospital, Colchester, Essex


Attitudes to Abortion

Sr,—Your leading article (13 April, p. 69) is a sad reflection of the confused thinking in current medical and national ethics.

From the time of Hippocrates until 1967 abortion was unacceptable to the majority of doctors. You admit yourself that it "is contrary to what many people" (you do not suggest why this should be). Yet now you consider it "useful" that the Lane report may cause the fading away of "shrii... and emotional argument," and you accept that "no major changes will be made in abortion law in Britain in the foreseeable future." The use of these words implies an attitude of censure or at least distaste. But what is distasteful or reprehensible in arguing for the retention of a profession's ethical standards? And why should people not strive for the repeal of a law which permits the wholesale destruction of human life? Perhaps this is what you dislike as being "shrii... and emotional"—perhaps the profession and the country would like to live in a country in which there is no Act permits. Yes, Sir, this is a matter for human emotion—the emotion of pity for the human being deliberately liquidated as surely as by bullet, bomb, or gas chamber. And yet you surely would lament the latter.

And if abortion is morally right in some cases, why not in all? What right has any of us to say that one fetus shall die and not another? Why not accept abortion on application? Except in the two cases that cannot be any more wrong than selective abortion, and if morally right, why deny any fetus the right to be killed? You must be consistent.

So do not deny the argument and protest, for if these fads we shall all suffer further devaluation of human life.—I am, etc.,

MICHAEL MORRIS

Buckden, Hunts

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Alternatives to Animal Experiments

Sr,—We welcomed the Stephen Paget Memorial Lecture on this subject by Professor J. L. Gowans (23 March, p. 557), and we noted with regret your leading article (p. 528) with interest.

There are several points in both we would like to comment upon concerning certain conclusions drawn from the data presented, but content to the two issues that must be the final paragraph of the lecture. For surely Professor Gowans would not claim that the twin assertions therein can be fully substantiated in the published literature.

The first concerns the number of animals required for the provision of culture material. One of the recognized advantages of such systems is their economy in this