International Relations in Medicine

Sir,—The Royal Society of Medicine last year established an International Relations Office, one of whose principal aims is to provide members of the Society with information likely to be of help to them when visiting other countries. The International Relations Office now has a list of doctors in many European medical centres who speak English, and who on that account alone would be prepared to help members of the Royal Society of Medicine when they go there. The response to requests for help in this way has been most encouraging. I should therefore be most grateful if readers of this letter would let me have the names and addresses of doctors in European medical centres known to them, whom I might invite to join in this particular form of international co-operation in medicine.

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Stature in Cystinuria

Sir,—The literature contains data demonstrating that patients with the congenital metabolic disorder cystinuria are below average height or that the state of their nutrition is very poor. Colliss et al.2 showed that the mean stature of their series of 44 patients in England was 2.5 cm. less than of the normal population.

In a series of these patients whom we had occasion to study during the past 10 years in Czechoslovakia, we determined stature in relation to age. We examined 41 male and 36 female patients over the age of 20, in whom cystinuria was conclusively demonstrated by biochemical methods. Their stature was compared with the values for a normal Czechoslovak population (4,343 men and 4,752 women) examined by Reisenauer and Svobodova3 between 1949 and 1952. We compared our stature of our patients with the mean statures in the corresponding age groups of the normal population, determining the significance of the deviations of the differences by Student's t test. The mean stature of the cystinuric patient was then calculated from the standard deviation and the weighted mean of the stature of the normal population. The results are given in the Table. It can be concluded that, unlike the series of Colliss et al., our series does not show that adult cystinurics in Czechoslovakia have a lower stature than the normal population.

On the contrary, the stature of both male and female patients was somewhat higher than in the normal population, although the

Lithium—A Special Clinic?

Sir,—Lithium (usually as the carbonate) started to be used in psychiatry for the treatment of manic-depressive illness in 1949, when in general medicine it had already fallen into disuse as a salt substitute for cardiac patients, because its toxicity had led to several deaths.1 Consequently many psychiatrists are reluctant to use lithium. Its use was reviewed by Schou with the conclusion that "lithium therapy seems to offer advantages over other available thioureas," but stressing that lithium is toxic and patients should be supervised clinically and biochemically. Baasstrap4 suggested that lithium has a prophylactic action in manic-depressive illness and reports since have supported this view. Recently it has been reported that there has been a high proportion of patients responding to lithium.5 It is clear that lithium must not be given in a haphazard manner. It has been said that the criteria for selection of patients and prophylaxis are not rigorous enough, that there has been no controlled double blind trial, and that stringent demands for safety and efficacy should be met before a new drug is widely used,6 but an adequate trial in manic-depressive psychosis would be difficult. In 1961 Wingard concluded that there were no therapeutic uses for lithium, but since then the opinion has gained ground that it is beneficial to a proportion of patients with severe disease. An answer could be its use under carefully controlled clinical and chemical supervision in a special clinic. This might help us to learn more about prescribing lithium and the type of patient responding to it.

A general hospital outpatient clinic has been developed for patients with manic-depressive illness maintained on lithium carbonate. Patients usually have had a long history with many attacks and are often our former inpatients, but cases are also referred from elsewhere in the region. All patients are

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Mood and the "Pill"

Sir,—I agree with Dr. Ellen C. G. Grant and Dr. J. Frye-Davies (28 September, p. 777) that there is a significant incidence of depression and diminished libido in women on oral contraceptives, even taking into account that some women may already be depressed and/or have had water and electricity before embarking on the pill. Lumping together depression and diminished libido, which in my experience not infrequently occurred independently of each other, gives a figure of 17.7% in a 5-year follow-up of 1,000 women at Croydon compares very favourably with Dr. Grant's overall incidence of 16% in what is essentially a subjective clinical assessment.

I am very impressed by Dr. Grant's account of the fluctuations of endometrial monooamine oxidase in response to the various oestrogen/