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VOL. I FOR 1977

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

Maternal Serum-alpha-fetoprotein Measurement in Antenatal Screening for Anencephaly and Spina Bifida in Early Pregnancy
U.K. Collaborative Study

1323

Evaluation of a Sucrose/electrolyte Solution for Oral Rehydration in Acute Infantile Diarrhoea

Asok Chatterjee, M.B., Dilip Mahalanabis, M.R.C.P.E., K. N. Islam, M.R.C.P.E., T. K. Maitra, M.B., S. K. Agarwal, F.R.C.S., D. K. Bagchi, M.B., S. Indra, M.R.C.P.E.

1333

Merozoite Vaccination of Doucoucouli Monkeys Against *Falciparum* Malaria

G. H. Mitchell, Ph.D., W. H. G. Richards, Ph.D., G. A. Butcher, Ph.D., Prof. S. Cohen, M.D.

1335

Immunisation with a Polyvalent Pneumococcal Vaccine

I. D. Riley, M.R.C.P.E., P. I. Tarr, A.B., M. Andrews, B.Sc., M. Pfeiffer, B.Sc., R. Howard, M.B., P. Challands, G. Jennison, M.B., R. M. Douglas, F.R.A.C.P.

1338

Comparison of Oral 25-hydroxycholecalciferol, Vitamin D₃ and Ultraviolet Light as Determinants of Circulating 25-hydroxyvitamin D
T. C. B. Stamp, M.R.C.P., J. G. Haddad, M.D., C. A. Twigg

1341

REVIEWS

Notices of Books

1343

QUESTIONABLE ROUTINES

Prophylactic Antimicrobial Drug Therapy at Five London Teaching Hospitals
Study Group on the Use of Antimicrobial Drugs

1350

OCCASIONAL SURVEY

Relation Between Smoking and Age of Natural Menopause
Hershel Jick, M.D., Jane Porter, M.S., A. S. Morrison, M.D.

1353

POINTS OF VIEW

The Law and the Juvenile Donor
C. M. Clothier, Q.C.

1355

COMMENTARY FROM WESTMINSTER

Secure Units for the Mentally Ill
Violence to Children

1373

1374

OBITUARY

Desmond Francis O'Neill

1374

NOTES AND NEWS

Priorities for Family Planning Plans for the Mentally Handicapped
Back Pain
Curbs on Cigarette Advertising
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
University of Birmingham
Lady Tata Memorial Trust
Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales

1375

1375

1376

1376

1376

1376

1376

1376

1376

1376

1376

Screening for

Neural-tube Defects
Valid Parental Consent
Atherogenic Hormones
Cosmetic Talc Powder
Haemophilus Endocarditis
The New England Journal of Medicine

1345

1346

1347

1348

1349

1350

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Definition of Perinatal Mortality
Dr P. M. Dunn;
Mr Wilfred Mills, F.R.C.O.G.

1357

Hormone Replacement Therapy and Endometrial Carcinoma
Dr T. M. Mack,
Dr M. C. Pike

1358

Postmenopausal Oestrogen Replacement and Lipids
Dr Lars Wallentin,
Dr Ulf Larsson-Cohn

1358

Prenatal Diagnosis of Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy
Dr L. Stengel-Rutkowski and others

1359

Glucose-6-phosphatase Activity in Human Placenta: Possible Detection of Heterozygote for Glycogen-storage Disease Type I
Dr Reuben Matalon and others

1360

Selection of Bone-marrow Aplasia Patients for Allogeneic Bone-marrow Transplantation
Prof. G. Mathé,
Dr L. Schwarzenberg

1361

HLA Antigens and Severe Combined Immunodeficiency Disease
Dr A. A. Rimm,
Dr M. M. Hortin

1361

Plasma and Serum-cholesterol Levels in Patients with Familial Hypercholesterolemia
Dr J. H. Ansell and others

1362

Effect of Parental Immobility on the Child
Dr J. H. Ansell, F.R.C.S.;
Dr J. H. Ansell, F.R.C.S.

1363

False Economy in the Laboratory
Prof. D. H. Wright

1363

Detection of Infantile Gastroenteritis Virus (Rotavirus) by ELISA
Dr D. J. Ellens, Dr P. W. de Leeuw

1363

Determination of Specific Antibodies to Influenza by ELISA
Dr S. Delia and others

1364

Chronic Familial Vascular Encephalopathy
Dr D. L. Stevens and others

1364

Theophylline and Cromoglycate (Cromolyn) in Asthma
Dr Miles Weinberger

1365

Immunoreactive Somatostatin in Pancreatic Islet-cell Carcinoma Accompanied by Ectopic A.C.T.H. Syndrome
Dr K. Kovacs and others

1365

Overdiagnosis of Endocrine Gut Tumours
Mr I. M. Modlin, F.R.C.S.,
Dr S. R. Bloom

1366

Long-term Treatment with Cimetidine in Duodenal Ulceration
Prof. G. B. Porro,
Dr M. Petrillo

1366

Endoscopy versus Radiology in Acute Upper-gastrointestinal-tract Bleeding
Dr P. B. Cotton

1367

Intravenous Urography in the Management of Acute Retention
Dr Bryan Donnelly and others

1367

Schizophrenia and Rheumatoid Arthritis
Dr Eva Österberg and others

1367

Tryptophan and Monoamine Metabolites in Ventricular Cerebrospinal Fluid after Severe Cerebral Trauma
Dr M. T. Hyypä and others

1367

Treatment of Cushing's Disease with Cyproheptadine
Dr C. J. Pearce and others

1368

Alcohol-induced Pseudo-Cushing's Syndrome
Dr Anthony Smals,
Prof. Peter Kloppenborg

1369

Rebound Thrombocytosis after Alcohol Abuse
Dr W. R. Currie,
Dr A. Naegi

1369

Alcohol and Head Injury
Dr A. R. Patel and others

1369

Is Bone Loss in Chronic Renal Failure Sex-dependent?
Dr Claus Christiansen and others

1370

Eskimos and Multiple Sclerosis
Dr W. W.-C. Chan

1370

Simultaneous Bacterial and Viral Meningitis
Prof. F. Squadrini and others

1371

***Bacteroides fragilis* Meningitis**
Dr B. Chattopadhyay

1371

***Klebsiella meningitis* Treated with Intrathecal Amikacin**
Dr C. S. Block and others

1371

Lymphadenopathies and Phenytoin
Dr P. D. Bellido and others

1372

Spontaneous Fracture of Polyvinyl Chloride T Tube
Mr W. Gillison, F.R.C.S.

1373

Effect of Distress on Factor-VIII Activity
Dr G. G. Nenci,
Dr G. Agnelli

1373

NEWSPAPER

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subjects, whether manifest in the fasting or in the stimulated state, is independent of coexisting obesity and glucose intolerance although both are often contributory factors. Which is chicken and which is egg is unresolved but experimental evidence favours a causal role for hyperinsulinaemia. Long-continued administration of insulin to animals in supra-optimal doses can give rise to histological and biochemical lesions resembling those of human atheroma¹³ and insulin encourages the synthesis of cholesterol and other lipids by arterial-wall tissue^{14,15} both in vivo and in vitro. Of the many factors known to cause exaggerated insulin secretion some, such as obesity and high sucrose consumption,¹⁶ have been implicated, on epidemiological grounds, in the pathogenesis of atherosclerosis whilst others, such as increased consumption of sugary alcoholic drinks,¹⁷ have so far not been. Conversely, certain types of vegetable fibre, the exclusion from the diet of which have been claimed to increase the risk of atheroma,¹⁸ reduce the immediate and overall insulin secretory response to ingested carbohydrate¹⁹ without adversely affecting glucose tolerance. The role of the insulinotropic gastrointestinal hormones in providing the link between composition of the diet and the hyperinsulinaemia of atherosclerosis is undetermined and awaits investigation by the newer methods of measuring them in blood.

COSMETIC TALC POWDER

FROM time immemorial man, like his evolutionary predecessors, has been exposed to airborne dusts. Such exposure is a corollary of living and survival. Not unexpectedly, therefore, the lungs have efficient means of clearing themselves of inhaled particles and a functional reserve such that the accumulation of uncleared dust may be considerable before there is any obvious loss of work-capacity. However, it has long been recognised that heavy exposure to dusts, such as quartz and asbestos, may lead to loss of function and, in the case of asbestos, to cancer of the pleura and of the lung itself. The observation that even casual exposure to asbestos may be associated with increased risk of mesothelioma, now occurring at the rate of nearly 200 new cases a year in the United Kingdom,¹ has brought into question the safety of other common dusts such as cosmetic talc. There are two main concerns. Firstly, will inhalation of a dust cause loss of function through fibrosis or emphysema? And, secondly, will it predispose to cancer?

Although talc can cause granulomas when introduced into the tissues or body cavities,² exposure to cosmetic talc has been widely assumed not to predispose to pulmonary fibrosis. However, the fact that no association has been seen between the use of talc and loss of lung function might simply reflect the lack of methods sensitive enough to detect losses of function that are small compared with those due, for example, to smoking and to heterogeneity in α_1 -antitrypsin status. For similar reasons any effect of talc exposure on cancer incidence would probably escape notice unless deliberately sought. Until lately facilities for studying the long-term effects of inhalation of dusts in laboratory animals have been scarce, and even now the predictive value of animal models is questionable. Thus, even in the case of tobacco smoke, where the cancer hazard to man is indisputable, duplication of the effect, by the inhalation route, in laboratory animals has proved difficult or impossible,³ although inhaled asbestos dust has given positive results in animals.⁴

The possibility that talc causes cancer dramatically hit the headlines of the daily Press when workers in Cardiff⁵ reported finding talc particles in cancers of the ovary and uterine cervix. The report was greeted with scepticism because the particles were not positively identified as talc, because their presence did not prove causation, and because they might have found their way onto the sections as a result of contamination of tissues after removal from the body. Subsequent mineral analysis failed to confirm that the particles were talc⁶ and the passage of six years without publication of confirmatory evidence suggests that the early scepticism was well-founded. A meeting of talc-powder manufacturers and independent scientists took place at Cardiff during May, 1976, under the chairmanship of Dr J. C. Gilson, director of the Medical Research Council Pneumoconiosis Unit. At that meeting the toxicology of talc was reviewed and the need for further information discussed. Assessment of toxicity necessarily starts with a consideration of the physical and chemical specifications of the test material, and this, unfortunately, is also where much of the assessment ends in the case of cosmetic talc because most of the published reports—epidemiological, clinical, and experimental—concern exposure either to industrial talcs that are variously contaminated with minerals known to be hazardous or to talc of undefined physical and chemical characteristics.

The long thin fibrous shape of asbestos particles enables them to be carried more deeply into the lungs than spherical particles of similar mass. The fact that the normally effective clearance mechanisms have difficulty in coping with large, long thin particles deposited deeply in the lungs is an important determinant of the hazards from asbestos dust. Geologically, talc (which is nominally a hydrated magnesium silicate) and certain amphiboles—tremolite, actinolite, and anthophyllite—may occur in juxtaposition and consequently talc may be contaminated with these minerals. Apart

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from this, talc may contain chlorite, quartz, carbonates such as calcite, dolomite, and magnesite), and occasionally other minerals in lesser amounts. During the past few years, major cosmetic manufacturers in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as represented by the Toilet Preparations Federation and the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association, have drawn up specifications for cosmetic talc which ensure the virtual absence of fibrous amphiboles.⁷⁻¹⁰ At present there is no direct statutory control of the quality of cosmetic talc in any country and it is questionable whether such control is necessary to bring minor manufacturers into line with the standards now adopted by the major firms. The presence of fibrous particles in talc reduces its free flow and lubricity, thereby rendering it less cosmetically desirable. Such contamination is thus self-limited. More important, however, is the fact that the fibrous materials most likely to contaminate talcs which do not comply with the specifications—namely, tremolite, anthophyllite, and actinolite—are not those most clearly associated with carcinogenic hazard (crocidolite, amosite, and chrysotile). Furthermore, it would be sensible to consider what controls, if any, are necessary for talc as used in medicines, before introducing legislation specifically in relation to cosmetic talc.

If the inhalation of particles of amphibole and silica contaminated talc dust were found to be harmless, one might reasonably assume that talc free from these materials is safe. Kleinfeld and his colleagues have studied the incidence of cancer and respiratory diseases in talc miners and millers in New York State. The talc concerned, which is heavily contaminated with both amphiboles and free silica, was initially reported to be associated with an increased mortality from mesothelioma and cor pulmonale.¹¹ Later the same workers reported that men employed in the mine after dust levels had been reduced had death-rates from malignant diseases that were similar to those for White males in the U.S.A. generally.¹² Also in the U.S.A., Fine and his colleagues¹³ have reported a higher prevalence of productive cough and chronic obstructive lung disease among rubber workers exposed to a non-fibrous industrial-grade talc than among control workers. From their data they calculated that a safe exposure level would be provided by a threshold limit value of 0.25 mg/m³ mass-respirable particulate talc. In Italy, Rubino and his colleagues¹⁴ compared the spectra of causes of death among talc miners, talc millers, and agricultural workers. The talc miners were exposed to dusts containing 5% silica at levels far in excess of threshold limit value. Significantly more of them than of the controls died from respiratory disease, but death-rates from all forms of cancer, including lung cancer, were significantly lower among the

miners than among the controls. By contrast, among the talc millers, exposed to dusts containing 0.05% silica, but no detectable asbestos, at concentrations of 20 million particles per cubic foot (27 litres), there was no excess of deaths from pulmonary disease or cancer of any site compared with the control group. The deficit of lung cancer among the talc miners is plausible in so far as a similar deficit of lung cancer among coal miners seems to be real.¹⁵ A continuing study of over 3200 persons, mainly women, at a factory in Britain where cosmetic talc has been made and packed for over fifty years, has so far revealed no evidence of health hazard,¹⁶ but follow-up would need to be extended for at least a further decade before one could be confident of a negative result. Other less informative epidemiological studies are reviewed by Hildick-Smith.⁶

In most of the work in animals the quality of the talc has not been specified. An exception is a report by Wehner and others¹⁷ who studied the effects in hamsters of repeated exposure to aerosols of cosmetic talc up to total doses of respirable particles equal to nearly 2000 times those received by humans using cosmetic talc during baby care. Exposure had no adverse effect on body-weight, survival, incidence of pathological changes in the respiratory tract, or incidence of neoplasia at any site. Another exception is the report by Wagner and his colleagues,¹⁸ who saw no mesotheliomas in 48 rats after intrapleural administration of cosmetic talc whereas 18 out of 48 rats similarly exposed to chrysotile asbestos acquired such tumours. The same workers exposed rats to cosmetic talc by the inhalation route on five days a week for up to a year. At the highest level of exposure—about three times that studied by Wehner and his colleagues¹⁷—there was slightly more pulmonary fibrosis than in controls, but no substantial excess of pulmonary neoplasms. A number of less relevant animal studies, all of which gave negative results for carcinogenicity, are reviewed by Hildick-Smith.⁶ In summary, there is no reason to believe that normal consumer exposure to cosmetic talc has in the past led either to cancer at any site or to measurable loss of lung function. It seems unlikely that future exposure to cosmetic talc of the specifications now agreed to by major manufacturers will present a health hazard.

HÆMOPHILUS ENDOCARDITIS

Haemophilus endocarditis is rare. Until lately the published reports were small-scale and conflicting; now three substantial and independent investigations have been reported from the United States.¹⁻³

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