

MEDICINE

Kidney Disease From Drug

► THE DEATH of a female night club entertainer after being examined for gall bladder trouble has brought to the attention of the medical profession an unrecognized danger of a widely used drug.

Reminiscent of dangers pointed up by the thalidomide situation, a report on a fatality after use of bunamiodyl sodium, in the New England Journal of Medicine, 267:389, 1962, advises caution in the use of this and similar drugs with patients who have jaundice or renal insufficiency.

When such radiopaque compounds are used to visualize the gall bladder before X-ray, a procedure called cholecystography, kidney failure can result from the increased load of these compounds in patients with liver disease. This is what happened in the reported case.

Dr. Arlan Gottlieb, one of three physicians reporting the case of the patient's death in New York, is now in the molecular biology department of the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Md.

"Commonly used, widely tested drugs can under certain circumstances give rise to untoward effects," Dr. Gottlieb told SCIENCE SERVICE. "But although penicillin allergy, for example, last year killed more people than snake bites, this does not mean that the benefits of this excellent antibiotic should be denied those who can tolerate it.

Unfortunately, there is no way of telling when this sensitivity may appear."

Assisting Dr. Gottlieb with the report of treatment and autopsy on the 44-year-old entertainer were Dr. Harry Spiera, now doing research at Columbia University and Presbyterian Hospital, and Dr. Enoch Gordis, now a researcher at Rockefeller Institute, both of New York.

All three were serving as residents at Mount Sinai Hospital, New York, when the patient was brought in from another hospital after four days of kidney failure following jaundice. Preceding the kidney failure, but while she was jaundiced, she had been given a large dose of bunamiodyl sodium preceding gall-bladder X-ray. She had had no previous renal disease, but the researchers believe her deranged liver function resulted in too great a load for the kidneys, which ultimately failed to function.

Warnings of "contra-indication" for radiopaque compounds preceding X-ray of the gall bladder in liver disease now appear in the 1962 Physicians' Desk Reference to Pharmaceutical Specialties and Biologicals.

Bunamiodyl sodium is produced under the trade name Orablix, by E. Fougera and Company, Hicksville, N. Y. Another radiopaque fluid with "severe impairment of both renal and hepatic function," is Squibb's Cholografin.

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Toes to Replace Hands Of Thalidomide Babies

► TOES when present may be trained to replace absent hands of thalidomide-damaged babies in Great Britain.

Most of the affected children survive with normal intelligence, Dr. A. White Franklin of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, reported in the British Medical Journal, Aug. 25, 1962. He said that there is no place in the situation for the view that these handicapped babies are hopeless, incurable, and not worth spending time and money on.

"Toes may acquire the skill and natural grace of movement of fingers," Dr. Franklin said. He noted that the mouth also can be trained to help replace the missing hands and "confer the priceless gift of independence."

Any appendage, however rudimentary, should be retained, he advised, because sensation is normal and the valuable "positional sense" of digits and limbs must be preserved.

"It cannot be emphasized too strongly," the physician said, "that surgery should never be undertaken hastily in these children, but should follow consultation between orthopedic, plastic and limb-fitting surgeons. Rarely, if ever, is it indicated in young infants."

Physiotherapy will show the need for special supports or slings so the infants with limb defects can achieve a vertical instead of a lying position for some part of the day.

The number of babies damaged by thalidomide in Great Britain will not be known until the middle of September, after which date there should be no more cases of this kind.

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Drastic Surgery Gives New Life to Paralyzed

► A 29-YEAR-OLD patient, paralyzed from birth, has survived surgery that literally cut him in half but gave him new life.

To halt the spread of cancer, which had developed in enormous bed sores on the patient's legs, surgeons amputated both legs and the pelvis, the American Congress of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in New York was told.

Now the amputee can sit upright in a wheel chair with the aid of a special plastic jacket. He can move to the wheel chair by hoisting himself on a horizontal bar above his bed and lowering himself into the jacket, which is bolted to the chair and mounted on hinges.

Using his hands for eating, reading and writing, the formerly idle bedridden man has become as independent as any individual bound to a wheel chair.

Dr. Jessie K. M. Easton of the University of Minnesota department of physical medicine and rehabilitation reported the results of surgery.

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SUN TRACKER—This huge mechanism will follow the sun all day, every day, when it becomes the top of a giant solar telescope. The heliostat is shown assembled for final testing at the Sunnyvale, Calif., division of Westinghouse before being shipped to Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona. The mount will hold an 80-inch mirror that will reflect an image of the sun larger and more detailed than possible with any other instrument.