

medical sciences notes

DEATH

Certificates invalid, WHO says

Death certificates written by doctors throughout the world are not valid in a great many cases, a World Health Organization committee on health statistics charges.

Study is needed of the archaic "chain of events" logic employed in the filing of many forms. Acute infections may fit this pattern, the committee says in a published report, but this concept "is less applicable to deaths occurring in old age and even in middle age."

Physicians may be induced to put undue emphasis on a relatively unimportant aspect of a case because of conceptions concerning which of the various conditions should be included and how they should be arranged on the certificate.

"The ideal would be to have all important disorders stated without necessarily requesting, as in current practice, the distinction between underlying, contributory and incidental conditions," the committee advises.

WEIGHT REDUCTION

Health club warning

The American Medical Association has issued a warning to weight reducers who seek moral support in group therapy at commercial health clubs.

It is essential for any person who wants to lose weight to have a physical examination by his physician before participating in any of these programs, the AMA says.

There is a higher incidence of high blood pressure, heart and kidney diseases, disorders of the liver and gallbladder and diabetes mellitus in the overweight population than in those of normal weight.

The requirement for an unusual amount of exercise and sudden loss of significant amounts of weight may be hazardous for persons with any of these conditions.

"Adequate treatment of obesity is often a more complex matter than diet and exercise, the usual club regimen," the AMA statement reads. "While simple over-eating and under-exercising may be a cause of obesity, significant overweight frequently has a genetic, metabolic or psychological component which requires medical diagnosis and treatment. Because there is no single cause of obesity, there is no single proper treatment to correct it."

CANCER

Radiation cures by itself

Although surgery, radiation and drugs are usually considered a triumvirate of treatments for cancer, radiation alone can cure some types, a New York radiologist says.

Dr. Ralph Phillips, chairman of the department of radiation therapy at the Sloan-Kettering Memorial Hospital for Cancer and Allied Diseases, told an international symposium on radiation therapy in New York that Hodgkins disease, solid tumors of children and a variety of sarcomas that are not generally regarded as suitable for such treatment have been responsive to electron beam therapy.

"Total hospitalized care is the first condition for successful radiotherapy of the cancer patient," Dr. Phillips

says, explaining that a person who is potentially curable by radiation "must be given the same rest, the same freedom from work and worry, the same nursing care and hospital discipline as the surgical patient."

PSORIASIS

Turkey diet no cure

An error in laboratory technique during an analysis of white turkey meat made it appear that the meat was lacking in the amino acid, tryptophan. This led to a wrong conclusion to the effect that a white turkey-meat diet would be helpful in treating psoriasis.

Dr. Gordon C. Sauer of Kansas City, Mo., says in the March 18 *JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION* that preliminary results of an American study gave the impression in a well-known British medical publication that psoriasis in four patients was improved on the white-meat turkey diet. (The researchers had been investigating a low-tryptophan diet on arthritis as well as psoriasis patients.)

"Thus ends another chapter of premature reporting of an apparent therapeutic triumph," Dr. Sauer concludes. The American group had to notify the British publication of its error in stating that turkey meat contains no tryptophan. The white meat contains as much of this amino acid as the dark meat.

FLU PREVENTION

Combination of drugs reported in U.S.S.R.

A combination of amantadine chloride and interferon has been successfully used against Asian flu in animal tests by a team of Russian scientists in Moscow; the work is still experimental and has not been tried on humans.

By the synergistic action of both drugs, which enhances the effect of each, says Dr. S. V. Lavrov who heads the Moscow research, a small and less toxic dose of amantadine may be possible in the prevention of Asian flu. The findings are reported in the March 2 issue of *NATURE*.

Dr. Albert B. Sabin of Children's Hospital, Cincinnati, has opposed the licensing by the Food and Drug Administration of amantadine, but says the Russian work is sound, and should lead to further animal testing. Eventually this could lead to human treatment.

PREVENTION

Rabies transmission

Dr. R. Keith Sikes and co-workers at the Communicable Disease Center, Atlanta, Ga., find that rabies can be contracted by animals that were fed infected material. Although Dr. Sikes is certain there is no danger of humans getting rabies from food, animal experiments have shown that under "ideal conditions" the disease can be transmitted by the gastric route.

It had been believed that rabies could be caught only from the bite of an infected animal, or, rarely, through breathing of contaminated air.

In the Atlanta experiments, eight of 30 mice died after being fed extremely large doses of the brains of rabid mice.

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