

# medical sciences

Gathered from the American Medical Association meeting in Chicago last week

## ORGAN PRESERVATION

### Kidney survives freezing

Using radiation in the form of microwave energy to thaw an experimentally frozen kidney appears to be a promising technique in successful organ preservation. Calling the method a significant departure from previously attempted approaches, Dr. Herndon B. Lehr reports its use in thawing a kidney without causing massive structural damage to tissues in the process. A kidney thawed in his laboratory at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania was restored sufficiently to be able to produce urine under experimental conditions. "This marks the kidney as the first solid organ ever to survive freezing and represents an important step toward developing organ banks for transplantation," he comments.

## ANESTHESIOLOGY

### Disassociating patients from pain

A new class of anesthetics which disassociate patients from pain and from awareness of noise and activity around them without putting them out in the usual sense is the subject of growing interest. Addressing the AMA's Session on Anesthesia, Dr. John W. Pender of Palo Alto, Calif., called ketamine the most promising of this new group of experimental drugs belonging to the cyclohexylamine chemical family.

Ketamine apparently works on the brain in such a way that "sensory impulses might reach the cortex but are not perceived," he says, adding that precise details of its mode of action are still unknown.

Disassociative anesthetics have certain advantages. Ketamine, for example, takes effect within a minute and produces a minimum of postoperative side effects. Most important, Dr. Pender suggests, patients under these anesthetics retain reflexes and can maintain adequate respiration without assistance.

## HEPATITIS

### Volunteer blood donors present risk

A common belief is that persons receiving blood transfusions are more likely to be exposed to hepatitis from blood of paid donors than that from volunteers. This belief, according to Dr. John B. Alsever, is unfounded.

Dr. Alsever, vice president for medical affairs of Blood Services in Scottsdale, Ariz., says that in 15 years of experience at that blood center, most patients who contracted hepatitis transmitted from donor blood received blood from first-time donors. Data from other blood banks, he observes from surveys of their records, show no clearcut evidence that donors who sell their blood for cash are more likely to be hepatitis carriers.

Eventually, new techniques for prescreening blood for presence of the Australia antigen or hepatitis virus, now in experimental use (SN: 2/21, p. 200), may resolve the problem of transfusion hepatitis. In the meanwhile, he urges, careful screening of donors is es-

sential. Specifically, he recommends categorical rejection of donors from areas where hepatitis is endemic and follow-up studies of persons who develop hepatitis after receiving a transfusion so that the donor can be traced.

## PSYCHOLOGY

### Merit replaces harsh discipline

It may not be necessary to break an army recruit in order to turn him into a well disciplined soldier. Two military doctors suggest that a system founded on principles of education and learning work just as well.

Lieut. Col. W. E. Datel, a psychologist, and Lieut. Col. Llewellyn J. Legters of Fort Ord, Calif., report trying their system successfully on three companies of 150 men each. Because these troops have not yet faced combat, the doctors say it is too early to evaluate their program fully, but the fact that in two of the three companies the absence without leave rate was lower than usual is taken to be a good sign.

The Datel-Legters approach to training essentially emphasizes merit and reward rather than punishment. For passing inspection, readiness to begin daily training, drill sergeants' approval and high scores on written and performance tests, recruits can earn up to 50 merits each week of basic training. The top 35 percent of merit winners are considered for promotion.

## VENEREAL DISEASE

### Chimps infected with gonorrhea

One problem hampering researchers studying gonorrhea, a disease which public health officials say is reaching almost epidemic proportions in the United States, has been lack of an animal model. Now, Dr. John D. Schmale and his colleagues at the Venereal Disease Research Laboratory in Atlanta report establishment of the infection in chimpanzees. This opens the door to development of a specific blood test for the disease and to better understanding of its natural course.

## ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES

### AMA opposes pill warning

By mid-July, the Food and Drug Administration hopes to have the road cleared for its move to require drug companies manufacturing oral contraceptives to provide a brief warning leaflet directly to patients and a more thorough outline of potential hazards to physicians (SN: 6/20, p. 599).

The AMA promises a legal battle against the FDA on this issue. The House of Delegates voted to oppose "any requirement that interjects a Federal agency between a physician and his patient." In spite of an FDA compromise, substituting a brief warning to patients for its originally planned 600-word statement, the AMA considers any direct communication between the regulatory agency and patients an intrusion.