

to the editor

Safeguarding patient privacy

If any message was to be abstracted from my article questioning the morality of divulging psychiatric information to insurance companies, it couldn't have been done any better nor as succinctly as your writer did (SN: 7/17/71, p. 42).

Any fault, was in my original paper. The impact of national health coverage planning will be frightening, if the California Medi-Cal experience is of any criterion. As far as I know, none of the proposed plans incorporate any provisions for safeguarding privacy and confidentiality.

Maurice Grossman, M.D.
Palo Alto, Calif.

Trace elements

I was glad to see your report "Trace elements: No longer good vs. bad" (SN: 8/14/71, p. 112). Doesn't it strike anyone as funny that we must learn what trace elements to add to processed foods (is it enrichment, or partial restoration?) because we insist on first processing them out? Somewhat like going from here to Silver Spring

via San Francisco. Besides, officialdom will probably haggle over what and how much for years, as they have over the vitamins, and we need our good food now.

Ruby Rice Little
Arlington, Va.

Research on coal

The Office of Coal Research has a balanced program for development of clean fuel gases, clean liquid fuels and clean solid fuels from coal. This is in addition to our pipeline gas program described at the Secretary's signing of the agreement with the American Gas Association, Inc., and our interest in synthetic oil (SN: 8/7/71, p. 90). We are diligently searching (through our contractors) for ways to gasify coal, clean the gas, and transform it into electricity efficiently and at low cost. Our work at the Pittsburgh & Midway Coal Mining Co. is directed toward the production of a low-ash, low-sulfur solid fuel from coal. We are negotiating with the Consolidation Coal Co. and Hydrocarbon Research, Inc., to develop a method for producing a clean

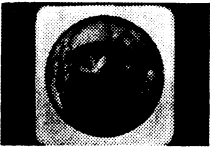
liquid fuel from coal—in one case by extraction-hydrogenation and in the other by direct hydrogenation. We are also attempting to develop improved systems (fluidized-bed combustion) to utilize coal in its conventional form with minimum damage to the environment. Which, of these many systems, will prove best in the long run we cannot tell. Other programs involve finding practical uses for wastes produced by the mining, processing and combustion of coal. A process for producing quality brick from flyash is nearing commercialization.

If our research work is successful, we may well develop alternate ways for producing a clean fuel that will be specific to a given coal and to a given geographical area of the country. We firmly believe in our program and hope to prove each of these systems has potential merit under some circumstances.

George Fumich Jr.
Director of Coal Research
U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Coal Research
Washington, D.C.

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