

science news® to the editor

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OF THE WEEK

skylab 1 returns	416
inter-american science meeting	416
prehistoric calendar mosaic	417
u.s.-soviet nuclear agreement	417
hollister earthquake 'imminent'	418
a calf from a frozen embryo	419
survival in the desert	419

RESEARCH NOTES

aerospace	422
biomedical sciences	422
urban environment	423
archaeoastronomy	423

ARTICLES

soviet mars probes	420
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SEMIANNUAL INDEX

424

DEPARTMENTS

letters	415
books	421

COVER: At the end of 1971, two Soviet spacecraft, Mars 2 and 3, became artificial satellites of Mars. Early results of their investigations reveal a number of things about the planet. See p. 416.

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Doctor-patient relationship

Your articles on the rise of malpractice suits (SN: 5/26/73, p. 338) were very interesting, but, from this health consumer's point of view, most suits are the result rather than the cause of a deteriorating doctor-patient relationship. The individual physician may not be as much to blame as the overall picture of health care, which reveals some disquieting contrasts:

- Even considering our high standard of living, we spend far more for health care than any other nation in the world, yet are rated a lowly 17th in health standing by the World Health Organization.
- Spectacular advances have been made in treating diseases, but hardly any in preventing them.

- A physician's work is most effective in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, yet the whole system is set up to emphasize the infallible professional (doctor) as opposed to the ignorant nonprofessional (patient).
- As part of the scientific community, physicians should be open to different avenues of research, yet as a group, they attack or ignore views and methods that do not coincide with the conventional line of thinking. A breakdown in communication between an informed patient (who might have successfully tried these methods) and an unaware or prejudiced physician is inevitable.

"Defensive medicine," in my opinion, will destroy the delicate doctor-patient relationship even more, because, by its very nature, it's insincere and will upset the cost-health balance even more.

As the awareness of these facts grows, the patient becomes angry and distrustful even before entering the doctor's office, and the integrity of the most able and dedicated physicians may be questioned by the very people they are trying to help.

Mary Kremser
Levittown, Pa.

Recycling feedlot wastes

The article, "Manure: Something new to swear by" (SN: 5/12/73, p. 314) presented very well the growing problem of feedlot wastes, and a potential means for employing this valuable source of nutrients. One comment, though, sent me thinking. The statement that "there is not enough land to spread it on" just isn't true.

It appears to me that as our priorities

mature, we will greatly broaden our range of recycling, and will find it both practical and necessary to return resources such as feedlot wastes to the natural cycle. This may well entail hauling (or pumping) feedlot wastes, sewage, paper and wood residue and whatever to both farmlands and forest lands near and far.

Marvin E. Kahn
Germantown, Md.

6,000-mile-long baseline

Your attention to our collaboration in the Soviet-American Very Long Baseline (VLB) radio astronomy experiment (SN: 4/14/73, p. 239) is very pleasing to me. Thank you.

L. I. Matveyenko
Space Research Institute,
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Moscow, U.S.S.R.

Precise and thoughtful

I thought your article on matter-anti-matter cosmology (SN: 5/5/73, p. 286) was excellent, thoughtful and precise so as to give an accurate description of my work and that of my colleagues on a popular level. I also appreciate your interest in my work.

Floyd W. Stecker
Theoretical Studies Branch
Goddard Space Flight Center
Greenbelt, Md.

Animals sense quakes?

In connection with the article "Can animals sense earthquakes?" (SN: 5/26/73, p. 341) a story told by a recent party appearing on "To Tell the Truth" is of interest. She lived through the Managua earthquake in Nicaragua and was described as a heroine in giving aid to the stricken.

The story is that an orphanage housing 150 children had a pet monkey. The monkey became so agitated at the very minor earlier quakes that the priest in charge said, "Alright children get up and get dressed for I believe the monkey is trying to tell us something." They spent the rest of the night out in the open. The orphanage was totally destroyed about 1-2 a.m. Surely the children would have died if they remained in the building.

Russell Duvall
Bay City, Mich.

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415