

Vaginal atrophy and hot flashes recur after estrogen therapy is stopped, and they can be severely disruptive to a woman's life, but they are not life-threatening conditions. Endometrial cancer, although it is highly treatable if it is diagnosed in the early stages of the disease, is still a very real threat to a woman's life and health. Given these two choices—a sort of quality vs. quantity of life decision—the panel said that “the decision of whether to initiate therapy should depend on the severity of the symptoms and the patient's perceived need for relief.”

Osteoporosis, in contrast to hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms, is considerably more of a health threat. It is far more common in women than in men, and its victims are prone to increased hip, wrist and spinal compression fractures. Sixteen percent of the women who suffer hip fractures will die of related complications within three months of the accident. Estrogen therapy can retard osteoporosis; three well-controlled studies document this, and some as yet unpublished evidence cited by Isaac Schiff of Harvard Medical School suggests that estrogen use may lead to a decrease in the number of osteoporosis-related fractures. But the panel offered no recommendations for this use of estrogens at this point because it is impossible to predict who is most prone to osteoporosis, and the therapy must be started around the time of menopause—before the osteoporotic damage is apparent—to be most effective.

There are psychological as well as physiological symptoms traditionally associated with menopause. But as panelist Anne M. Seiden of the American Psychiatric Association pointed out, no one has yet demonstrated that these symptoms are indeed caused by the physiological changes that occur with menopause, and no study has shown an increase in depression or irritability at menopause. Other panel members suggested that the relief of hot flashes and other physical symptoms afforded by estrogens might well lead to increased feelings of mental well-being. The panel did not recommend that estrogens be used to treat primary psychological problems at menopause.

In contrast to these partially unquantifiable risks and benefits, there are some clear contraindications for estrogen replacement therapy: a previous history of cancer, heart attack, stroke or blood clot in the lung; high blood pressure; and a strong family history of cancer.

The conclusion appears to be that each woman's symptoms must be considered individually. If she finds that her menopausal symptoms interfere with her life, and is otherwise healthy, and if she understands and is willing to take the risk, estrogens at the lowest effective dose and for the shortest period of time may be the best therapy. That—no more and no less—is the consensus until estrogens and their effects are better understood. □

Science magazines: The more the merrier

Is another post-Sputnik-like boom in science and technology about to hit us? Is there an expanding awareness of the relevance of science to our existence? Is there a growing need to be better informed about science? To judge from the number of recent, new and proposed ventures in popular science publishing, the answers to the above questions are yes.

OMNI, the magazine of science fact and science fiction, is celebrating its first anniversary this month and boasting a circulation of almost one million. The New York Times's weekly science section, *Science Tuesday*, has been with us for nearly a year and appears to be surviving. The American Chemical Society's *SCIQUEST* is a reworking of *CHEMISTRY* magazine in an attempt to reach a broader audience.

New on the scene this week are *SCIENCE 80* and a special edition of *SCIENCE DIGEST*. *SCIENCE 80*, a publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, came out this week with a projected circulation of 250,000 on a bimonthly basis. An attractive, feature-article magazine, it positions itself somewhere between *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN* and *POPULAR SCIENCE* and plans to achieve a circulation of one million, on a monthly basis.

The Hearst Corp. appears to be testing

the waters rather than taking a plunge. Instead of producing an entirely new magazine, as had been rumored, Hearst has issued a special, magazine-size edition of *SCIENCE DIGEST*. If this special issue is well received there may be more.

Several other science magazines are currently in the planning stages—The Foundation for National Progress, publisher of *MOTHER JONES*, has been working on a politicized science magazine; V.N.U., a Dutch publishing firm, is considering a science magazine for the U.S. audience, but plans have not been finalized. A number of other science magazines are reportedly in the works, but the one arousing the most interest at present is the on-again off-again entry of Time Inc. This magazine has been on and off the drawing board for more than a year, and two dummy issues have already been prepared. According to the Oct. 8 Gallagher Report, Time Inc. plans to do a one million piece direct mail promotion in January and base its final decision in March on the results. If the decision is positive, plans are to start up with a circulation of 1.5 million. If these plans and those of the other publishers come to fruition, we might be witnessing the beginnings of an era of increased scientific awareness. □

Blitz to declassify reveals bomb secrets

Temporary relaxation of federal standards regarding the declassification of formerly secret documents resulted in nearly 100—and possibly more—being “erroneously declassified,” according to a September 21 General Accounting Office study that served as the basis of a Senate hearing last week. The study, conducted for Sen. John Glenn's (D-Ohio) Governmental Affairs subcommittee, was to investigate how allegedly “sensitive” data pertaining to the design of thermonuclear weapons ended up in the public domain and in *THE PROGRESSIVE* magazine's much-talked-about article on the hydrogen bomb.

The situation developed, GAO says, when a program undertaken from 1971 to 1976 by the Atomic Energy Commission sought to declassify as many documents as quickly as possible from inactive files for better access by the general public and scientific community. Nearly 2.8 million were reviewed; of them, nearly 1.5 million were declassified, some in near-marathon sessions.

For example, between January 15 and February 16, 1973—a period of 33 days—234,215 of 388,092 documents reviewed by a team at Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory were declassified. “Some of the reviewers felt the thrust of the informal instruction at this review was, ‘whenever in doubt, declassify,’” the GAO

study reported. But in the rush, “simple administrative and clerical errors” crept in, such as the mistitling of reports or the failure to properly indicate when only an excerpt of a report was to be made available to the public.

In addition, the AEC dropped the mandatory second review of all declassification requests by its review teams during the crash program. It also loosened criteria for qualifying declassification reviewers. “In some cases the final decision to declassify a report rested with a review team member who was neither a classification specialist nor technically competent in the subject matter of the report,” the GAO study charged.

THE PROGRESSIVE magazine cited use of 40 of these declassified documents—obtained in the public library at Los Alamos (SN: 6/2/79, p. 360)—in their appeal of a government ban on their bomb article. The ban was dropped last month when the Madison Press Connection published the data the government had hoped to censor.

Only 19,000 of the nearly 1.5 million declassified documents have been listed. The Energy Department, which has begun a new review of the 19,000, has already identified 2,000 pertaining to nuclear weapons and withdrawn many pending closer scrutiny. Of 244 such documents, 91 have been reclassified. □