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This Week

- 228 Wildfires: Apocalypse Then and Now
- 228 Shuttle 4's secret debut
- 229 AIDS: Waiting for cure or treatment
- 229 TMI-1 restart underway
- 229 Radial keratotomy: An unkind cut?
- 230 Federal computer security concerns
- 230 New daminozide review
- 230 Animal-abuse case update
- 231 Cyg X-3: Photinos, quark nuggets?
- 231 Clams and worms fueled by gas?
- 231 Shark jaws of old

Research Notes

- 232 Biomedicine
- 232 Science & Society

Articles

- 234 Liquid Sand
Cover: During the 1964 Alaska earthquake, hundreds of railroad and highway bridges buckled when wet, sandy soil suddenly flowed like a liquid, carrying bridge abutments toward the center of stream channels. This phenomenon, known as soil liquefaction, is a leading cause of damage to structures during many major earthquakes. (Photo: USGS)
- 236 Hyperbaric Oxygen Bounces Back



Departments

- 227 Letters
- 238 Books

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Letters

Patients set stage for therapy

Are psychiatrists so vain that they think the only variable to be considered in the outcome of psychotherapy is the nature of their intervention ("I know how you feel — I think," SN: 8/24/85, p. 124)? It seems to me that the most logical interpretation of their data is that patients' perceptions of therapists' empathy depend on the patients' attitudes.

A patient who is capable of forming trusting relationships will assume the therapist cares how he or she feels, and will be ready to make the most of the therapeutic relationship. The patient who is suspicious or hostile will assume the worst of the therapist's intentions. Patients like this might have self-esteem so low that they cannot believe a therapist cares about them; they might believe their problem so unusual that the therapist could never understand it; or they might prefer to blame their lack of pro-

gress on the therapist. Whatever the reason, psychotherapists have to learn to face the fact that it is the patient's attitudes that set the stage for treatment.

Barbara Appelbaum
New York, N.Y.

Matter of taste

Ilene Bernstein's discovery of food aversion after chemotherapy ("Researchers identify 'cancer anorexia,'" SN: 8/31/85, p. 132) comes as no surprise to me. I (and, I assume, most other people) have noticed over and over that when I get sick soon after eating a particular food, I have an aversion to that food for a year or more afterward. I have long thought that this must be a body mechanism evolved to allow us to avoid poisonous foods, but I have never seen anything about it in any scientific literature until now.

Ted Toal
Nevada City, Calif.

Nucleus, not neutron

"Computer memories recall radiation dose" (SN: 8/31/85, p. 134) states: "Capture by the [boron or lithium] converter promptly causes the [thermal] neutron to emit an alpha particle — which is where the computer chip comes into play."

Please clarify the source of the alpha particle?!

J. Schufman
Reston, Va.

The source is not the neutron, as was incorrectly stated. When the nucleus of a boron or lithium atom in the converter captures the neutron, the nucleus becomes unstable and quickly splits, ejecting an alpha particle that the computer-chip dosimeter can now detect.
—J. Raloff

OCTOBER 12, 1985

227