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Letters

Down's syndrome, 'prenatal care'

As the mother of a son who has Down's syndrome, I take grave exception to the following sentence from "A Common Medical Denominator" (SN: 1/25/86, p. 60): "Improved prenatal care has steadily lowered the incidence of Down's syndrome. . . ."

Aside from the fact that the author is assuming that everyone would agree that amniocentesis followed by abortion is an appropriate definition of "improved prenatal care," which is patently not so, the statement is grossly and dangerously misleading. Any reader might quite rightly suppose that if a pregnant woman took good care of herself (diet, exercise, rest, no smoking, etc.), she could prevent Down's syndrome from occurring in her child. This, as the author clearly knows, is simply not true. There is nothing, short of abortion, that can prevent Down's syndrome, and of course it prevents a baby from being born, with or without Down's.

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This Week

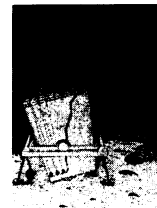
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Cover: On the moon, X-ray astronomers could set up their equipment right on the surface, since there's no atmosphere to interfere with the passage of X-rays. This is a proposed Large Area Modular Array of Reflectors, consisting of 32 identical telescopes pointing in the same direction; such a combination should be able to record very faint sources. A human colony on the moon could establish and maintain a large variety of astronomical equipment. (Drawing: Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics)
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Euphemisms like this have no place in scientific writing.

Lisbeth S. Giorgi
Huntington Beach, Calif.

Path of paradox

I don't understand how Jean-Pierre Vigié's experiment ("Holism and particlism in physics," SN: 2/1/86, p. 70) will tell us anything new about the wave-particle duality of the neutron, or any other particle. When he determines which path the neutron took, he will be imposing particle behavior on it and it will no longer interfere with itself. Is there some new factor in the experiment that wasn't discussed in the article (or did I miss it)?

Ruth E. Kastner
Greenbelt, Md.

In the Einsteinian view the experiment is supposed to tell which way the neutron chooses to behave. There is no reason to rule out beforehand a result in which it indicates that the neutron goes by one path and interferes with

itself nevertheless. The experiment will also test what information and predictions about the neutron's path come out of Bohm's potential.

— D.E. Thomsen

Paying through the nose

In "An economic case for banning smoking?" and "Nicotine: A Drug of Choice?" (SN: 1/18/86, pp. 40, 44) you lay out the costs of tobacco and report that the American Medical Association wants to ban advertising. Some have also suggested that the government stop subsidizing tobacco farmers.

While good ideas, they are subject to challenge. The correct solution is to cause the user to pay the full cost of his noxious habit. The nonuser now pays much of the cost in many ways, especially health insurance. Tobacco users shouldn't be able to buy regular health and life insurance but rather special policies on an "assigned risk" basis, like car insurance for alcohol abusers.

P. M. deLaubenfels
Corvallis, Ore.

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