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Letters

Miscalculations?

That infants can add and subtract ("Babies Add Up Basic Arithmetic Skills," SN: 8/29/92, p.132) probably should come as no surprise, since the past few decades have revealed increasingly amazing talents of the human brain. I just hope Karen Wynn's experiments haven't taught those infants that $1 + 1 = 3!$

Wayne Wyrick
Warr Acres, Okla.

Tau's theoretical underpinnings

Martin Perl's statement concerning the discovery of tau ("Particles of History," SN: 9/12/92, p.174) is misleading. He states that in the design of the detector "there was nothing... hinting at what was actually discovered. No one was sure what they were looking for."

This is not true. Several years before the tau was discovered, I wrote a paper (PHYSICAL REVIEW LETTERS, 1971) discussing in great detail how the heavy lepton should decay if its

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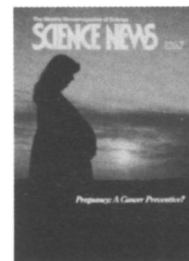
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Cover: Pregnancy appears to help protect women against certain kinds of cancers. A Los Angeles research team has used that knowledge to create a controversial hormone treatment aimed at preventing cancer of the breast, ovaries, cervix, and endometrium. (Photo: Chris Butcher)



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mass is 0.6, 0.8, 1.2, 1.8, 3.0, or 6.0 Gev. The 1.8 Gev value is closest to the present value of 1.777 Gev. Furthermore, my paper was cited in the original proposal for the experiment at Mark I detector for SPEAR at SLAC. Essentially, they used my calculation for their proposal.

There may be times when theory is not coupled with experimental discovery, but in this particular case it was.

Yung Su Tsai
Theoretical Physics Group
Stanford Linear Accelerator Center
Stanford, Calif.

Back to bloodletting?

In "Excess Iron Linked to Heart Disease" (SN: 9/19/92, p.180), Dr. Sullivan suggests that donating blood may reduce the risk of heart attacks.

What is going on? First we hear that the anticoagulating abilities of leeches are helpful in healing surgically reattached fingers, and now Dr. Sullivan is advocating the healthful properties of bloodletting.

What's next? Barber-doctors drilling holes in people's skulls to release evil spirits?

Blake Ashley
Downey, Calif.

Now that we find that excess iron in the blood may be a risk factor for heart disease, and since bloodletting or even blood loss, as in menstruation, is an ameliorating factor, maybe the old-fashioned practice of phlebotomy will be restored to the physician's armamentarium.

In any case, we may learn not to sneer so fast at some practices of old-time medicine.

Arthur J. Morgan
New York, N.Y.

Causes of competitive disadvantage

Regarding "Tackling R&D Stagnation" (SN: 9/19/92, p.190), I believe the National Science Board missed a fundamental competitive advantage of research conducted by the Germans and Japanese. They do not publish

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