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Cover: Fluctuating asymmetry — differences between the right and left sides of an animal's body — may provide important clues to behavior, including that of humans. Two English researchers, for example, find that the less perfect a racehorse's body symmetry, the more poorly it performs on the track.
(Photo: United States Trotting Association)



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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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Letters

Uncertainty: Preeclampsia prelude?

Regarding "Semen protects against preeclampsia" (SN: 10/15/94, p.246), a much more likely explanation for this condition, from the feminine perspective, is that a relationship of less than a year's duration cannot yet be considered permanent.

This uncertainty is stressful, causing high blood pressure and other symptoms. An ongoing relationship, especially when children of that relationship are already present, is felt as permanent and is therefore less stressful and less likely to cause preeclampsia.

Barbara Harrison
Chestertown, Md.

Pangaea coverage faulted

In "Out of Africa: Clues to dinosaur evolution" (SN: 10/15/94, p.245), it is stated that "Pangaea covered most of Earth." This is false. Then, as now, most of Earth's surface was

covered by water. A correct statement would be that most of the land surface of Earth belonged to the supercontinent Pangaea.

Joseph B. Kruskal
Maplewood, N.J.

Medical ethics and sick volunteers

Though I have my own doubts about the ethics of the prophylactic tamoxifen study, I cannot accept the view (attributed to Arthur Caplan) that medicine has "special obligations to the healthy volunteer" ("Tamoxifen Turmoil," SN: 10/22/94, p.268).

Surely the unhealthy volunteer has precisely the same rights as the healthy volunteer; and research subjects who have had breast cancer and take tamoxifen to prevent recurrence have the same rights as research subjects who have never had breast cancer and take tamoxifen to prevent an initial occurrence.

In my own surveillance of human research, I have heard it said that sick patients have "an investment" in their disease and that

this investment justifies a lower risk-benefit ratio than that acceptable for "normal controls," lower financial compensation, and so forth — even when the study of the disease has no therapy in sight. This makes the sick subject a second-class citizen in the world of research.

The whole thrust of medical ethics in the clinical setting has been to restore autonomy to the sick. The same attitude should prevail when the sick are involved in medical research.

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CLARIFICATION

The study cited in "Female war vets: Traumatic pains" (SN: 1/7/95, p.11) was published in the December 1994 *JOURNAL OF CONSULTING AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY*.

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