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Cover: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proposing to reverse much of its South Florida plumbing project that drained the Everglades 50 years ago. Everglades populations of wading birds, such as the great egret, have declined by 90 percent in recent decades, largely because of disruptions in water flow. **Page 252** (Photo: South Florida Water Management District)

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Letters

Another apoptosis development

Your report "Diabetic pregnancy risk starts early" (SN: 12/5/98, p. 356) brings up a very important and underdiagnosed problem. Controlled apoptosis is critical to the normal development of the optic nerve. However, in optic nerve hypoplasia, there is a marked reduction in the complement of fibers.

We and others have demonstrated that babies are born with this following a pregnancy in which the mother either ingested certain pharmaceuticals (especially anticonvulsants) or was diabetic. It makes excellent sense that the high blood sugar in some diabetic women leads to high Bax production, which in turn overinduces apoptosis, leading to underdevelopment of the optic nerve and impaired vision. What is particularly frightening is that optic-nerve hypoplasia probably represents the tip of an iceberg of other congenital brain defects that are even more difficult to ascertain.

*Alfredo Sadun
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, Calif.*

White coat, black eye

Your article "White-coat hypertension" (SN: 12/12/98, p. 380) exhibits the time-honored medical practice of blaming the patient. One wonders about patients with chronic, difficult-to-diagnose diseases who have suffered abuse from doctors who attribute their symptoms to hypochondria; patients who have witnessed egregious misdiagnosis or malpractice and have lost their confidence in the profession; and patients who have had to accept treatment from uncommunicative, arrogant, or otherwise abusive physicians. In short, this condition calls for investigation

into whether the person most in need of treatment is the doctor.

*Thomas L. Wymer
Bowling Green, Ohio*

Regarding "White-coat hypertension," I am a person who finds the pumping up of a blood pressure cuff to a high level very painful. Whenever that happens, my blood pressure reading is sharply elevated. One particular "white coat" pumps the pressure up to almost 300 millimeters in spite of my complaints. Real pain is stressful and unnecessary. I also find it infuriating.

*L. Garvin
Bellingham, Wash.*

CORRECTION

"Prospects dim for live AIDS vaccine" (SN: 2/13/99, p. 100) reported that 6 of 8 infant monkeys died after receiving a vaccine for simian immunodeficiency virus. The article also stated that 2 young monkeys given the vaccine developed AIDS and 5 of 16 adult monkeys died from the vaccine. According to Ruth M. Ruprecht, the infant monkeys have immune problems but not full-blown AIDS, and although five adult monkeys died, only one death was conclusively attributed to AIDS.

Nobody who has entered a physician's office in a timely fashion and then spent 2 hours in a crowded waiting room with squally brats sneezing fungus all over him is surprised by a blood pressure spike when he is finally approached by a physician. The surprising thing is that the incidence of white-coat nasal contusion syndrome is as low as it is.

*Peter Jay Huck
Aurora, Ill.*