

# Medical Sciences Notes

## GENERAL PRACTICE

### Doctor's Orders Not Taken

Patients who take home prescription medicine do not always follow the doctor's orders, a Cleveland study of outpatient records proves.

Urine tests failed to show any trace of the tuberculosis drugs isoniazid and/or aminosalicylic acid in 15 to 50 patients. An earlier study had indicated that 83 percent of families claimed to have given a full 10-day course of penicillin to their children, but evidence showed that 82 percent had stopped the medicine by the ninth day.

Some patients also deny taking medicines when they have. One study found that 29 of 38 patients who had taken meprobamate, barbiturates or phenothiazines denied taking these tranquilizers.

The outpatients were seen at the University Hospital, and came from a poor downtown section of Cleveland.

## LASER

### Laser Treats Birthmarks

Using even low-energy laser beams to treat the reddish wine-colored birthmark called a hemangioma seems like an elephant stamping out a flea. But the ugly port-wine stain is stubborn, and Dr. Leon Goldman of the University of Cincinnati has been successful in improving the color of 17 among 29 hemangiomas he has treated.

## HEART

### Sudden Deaths Preventable

The "sudden death" of nearly half of the 500,000 heart attack victims in the United States each year does not come unannounced if the signs are recognized. In some 40 percent of the cases (which are related to abnormal rhythm), death might be prevented.

The electrocardiograph shows easily recognized abnormalities of heart rhythm—interruptions of the regular heart beat that can be corrected in time to forestall a full-blown coronary.

No change in the rhythm pattern, however harmless it seems, should go untreated, Dr. Bernard Lown, director of the coronary care unit of Peter Bent Brigham Hospital here, says in a report in the current *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Though sudden death "appears to be the hallmark of coronary artery disease," says Dr. Lown, he firmly believes that such "death . . . is not unannounced." Experience in coronary care units suggest, he notes, that death is preceded by easily recognized electrocardiographic abnormalities which provide time for counter-measures.

## DRUG SAFETY

### Cobalt Drugs for Anemia Banned

Drugs containing cobalt, commonly used in the treatment of iron-deficiency anemia, have been banned by the Food and Drug Administration on grounds of being neither safe nor effective.

Both prescription drugs and over-the-counter products are affected by FDA's decision to classify them as new drugs. This means the agency must have sound scientific evidence of their safety and efficacy before the prohibition is reversed.

A panel of hematologists will be appointed by FDA to study available data to determine whether or not there are any conditions under which cobalt preparations can be useful and harmless, and to decide whether or not cobalt actually does promote the restoration of iron in deficient red blood cells.

One doctor called cobalt-containing drugs "shot-gun therapeutics" that deserve the contempt of the medical profession.

Radioactive cobalt, vitamin-mineral products containing small amounts of cobalt, and cyanocobalamin are not affected by the decision.

Doubts about cobalt's safety were raised a few months ago when a number of deaths of heavy beer drinkers were blamed on cobalt. Cobalt salts in the beer were linked with heart ailments and subsequent tests in animals confirmed the connection.

## TRANSPLANTATION

### Bacteria Tied to Organ Transplants

Streptococci and staphylococci, two highly toxic bacteria, may hold the secret to successful survival of skin and organ transplants in man, according to a research report by Dr. Felix T. Rapaport of the New York University Medical School.

When patients are given massive doses of antigens, derived from certain strains of heat-killed bacteria, the antigens overwhelm his inborn reaction to foreign tissue without altering the body's general resistance to disease organisms. Because streptococci and staphylococci are widespread in nature, they offer a limitless supply of transplantation antigens.

Present techniques of neutralizing the body's ability to reject transplanted material can result in the survival of the transplanted tissue but may also lead to the death of the patient from massive infection.

## DIAGNOSIS

### Error Fatal in Surgery

An intestinal disease called amebiasis is so confusing in its signs and X-ray views that it can be mistaken for cancer, but if surgery is performed the results can be fatal.

Caused by amebas picked up in contaminated water or food, the disease afflicts nearly five percent of the U.S. population, especially in the warmer climates. It reached epidemic proportions in 1933 in Chicago.

Anti-amebic drugs usually can cure the trouble, but if a victim has not been treated, a misdiagnosis of cancer could lead to a dangerous operation, Drs. Malcolm C. Hill and Henry I. Goldberg of the University of California School of Medicine point out in the current issue of *The American Journal of Roentgenology, Radium Therapy and Nuclear Medicine*. If X-rays show colon ulceration, multiple tumors or other inflammation indications, physicians should consider the possibility that amebiasis is present.