

# medical sciences notes

## DRUGS

### Indocin attacked in Senate

Nowhere is there more demand for something new in treating a chronic disease than in arthritis of the painful, crippling kind, but after years of trial, it seems that aspirin is just as good and has fewer side effects than the most hopefully advertised discovery.

Testimony against Indocin, a Merck Sharp & Dohme product, by physicians of Tufts University and the University of Virginia, before a Senate Small Business Subcommittee emphasized its side effects and pointed out that arthritics had just as well take aspirin.

Dr. W. H. Kammerer of Cornell University Medical College, New York City, in his chapter on The Choice of Drugs for Arthritis and Rheumatic Disease in the book, 1968-69 DRUGS OF CHOICE, says Indocin's major usefulness is in treating degenerative disease of the hip joints, rheumatoid spondylitis (inflammation of the vertebrae) and acute gout.

In 1962 Merck started clinical trials on Indocin, whose generic name is indomethacin, and the Food and Drug Administration approved its commercial release in June 1966. From the beginning, Merck warned of side effects of the drug, but many doctors prescribed it for arthritic patients who found that it gave them marked relief.

Among the list of adverse reactions given by Merck in the 1968 PHYSICIANS' DESK REFERENCE are ulceration and gastrointestinal bleeding. Central nervous system reactions range from dizziness to convulsions, but frequently disappear if dosage is reduced.

## INFECTION

### Catheterization not routine

There is "some small hazard" of bringing infection into the kidney through ureteral catheterization, Dr. Carl W. Norden of Harvard Medical School says in an exchange of correspondence in the April 25 issue of THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE.

Commenting on a previous article in the journal of Feb. 22, 1968, on relapse and reinfection in chronic bacteriuria, authored by Drs. Marvin Turck, Allan R. Ronald and Robert G. Petersdorf of the University of Washington School of Medicine, Seattle, Dr. Norden says:

"... recurrence of infection cannot be predicted with great certainty since the authors' own data show that approximately 30 percent of patients with only bladder involvement will have relapse with the same organism, and 20 percent of those with renal involvement will have reinfection."

It is not clear, Dr. Norden further points out, that "ureteral catheterization has a place in the management of these infections and it admittedly carries some small hazard of bringing infection into the kidney."

In reply, Dr. Turck, who is head of the division of infectious diseases, King County Hospital, and assistant professor of medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine, says:

"Our plea is not for more ureteral catheterization, but rather for a means whereby techniques of differentiating relapse from reinfection are made more generally available to the practicing physician."

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## NUTRITION

### Rice substitute developed

A nutritious rice substitute, the Batina seed, has been developed by Prof. Lloyd E. Brownell of the University of Michigan's department of chemical engineering.

This is probably the first product that could be successfully substituted for rice in typical recipes, the scientist says. "Its major components are cereal flours (mostly wheat, with some oats, barley and corn) toasted soy flours, wheat germ, dehydrated yeast and vitamin and mineral supplements to give a completely balanced food."

Professor Brownell developed the Batina seed under the sponsorship of the Battelle Northwest Laboratories in Richland, Wash. The name Batina is a combination of the words Battelle and farina (a general term for cereal flours).

Although the U.S. Department of Agriculture has developed a food made of corn, soybeans and milk, called CSM, it is a gruel, really a baby food, Prof. Brownell says.

Brownell deliberately produced a lentil-shaped disk because rice is considered almost sacred in some parts of the world, and a direct imitation might be offensive.

Several students at Michigan's International Center have prepared dishes from their native countries using the Batina seed as a rice substitute. It cooks in about 10 minutes and has a pleasant, slightly nutty flavor.

## HEMATOLOGY

### Blood typing helped by snails

Several thousand garden snails from Australia have been sent to Dr. Tom Thomson of the North London Blood Bank for use in providing a reagent, or substance, for typing blood.

The English snails are being used to test for the Group A factor, which scientists discovered can be found as well from snail blood as from human. Because of a shortage of snails in England, the New South Wales Blood Transfusion Service is coming to the aid of the London typing laboratories. Snails are being bred and harvested to provide the necessary reagent.

## PEDIATRICS

### West German babies taller, heavier

A study of 27,000 babies born in West Germany since 1930 shows their average weight to be about four ounces heavier than before, a German periodical published in Washington, D.C., says. The report appears in the March 29 issue of WASHINGTON JOURNAL.

Dr. Henry Kirchhoff, head of the Women's Clinic of the University of Goettingen, who reports the research, adds that pediatricians in Hamburg, West Germany, have also established that newborn babies are on the average 0.8 inches taller than they were 20 years ago.

Improved nutrition and a better environment are believed to be the explanations, scientists say.

The only problem has been that the bigger babies are causing more difficulty in being born, and the percentage of cesarean sections being performed is much higher than ever before.