

medical sciences

ANTICOAGULANT

Heparin endangers the aged

Heparin has been an important anticoagulant drug for more than 30 years, but caution is necessary when it is used with patients who bleed easily.

Now an additional warning is added to its use among women over the age of 60. A study of 97 patients in a Boston hospital shows that the risk is greater with these elderly women than in men or in younger women. The death of a 67-year-old woman was attributed to heparin used to treat recurrent pulmonary embolism. The bleeding risk in those over 60 was 50 percent.

The discovery was made at Lemuel Shattuck Hospital by Drs. Hershel Jick, Dennis Slone, Ivan T. Borda and Samuel Shapiro, who are also on the faculty of Tufts University School of Medicine. Their report is in the Aug. 8 issue of *THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE*.

Comprehensive drug surveillance of patients in medical wards has been carried out for some time in three Boston hospitals, including Boston City and Peter Bent Brigham.

ALCOHOLIC HEPATITIS

False signs of cancer

Alcoholic hepatitis is a benign and potentially curable condition with symptoms resembling those of liver cancer.

Three Boston radiologists have discovered the key to the diagnosis in X-ray studies.

Weight loss and progressive deterioration are symptoms of both diseases, but angiography (X-ray after injection of material that can be seen in the arteries) can sort out the difference.

Four patients had long histories of alcoholism and enlarged livers that had pushed their stomachs to the left. The pattern of the arteries provided the clue to the differences in the diseases, especially since epinephrine, a vessel-constricting drug, had been used and made the differences more pronounced.

Drs. James A. Rourke, Morton Bosniak and Ernest J. Ferris of Boston University and Tufts University Schools of Medicine report the findings in the August issue of *RADIOLOGY*.

PREMATURITY

Homemade incubator saves lives

The ingenuity of a ship's doctor saved the lives of twins born prematurely while their mother crossed the Atlantic.

Dr. Guido Rizzie of the Italian liner *Aurelia* realized that the babies, a boy and girl two months premature, didn't stand much of a chance outside an incubator, so he made one.

He put five hot-water bottles in a bed in the ship's hospital and covered them with thick layers of cotton wool. Then he draped a plastic sheet around the bed and pumped in oxygen from cylinders borrowed from the engine room.

Two days after the birth, the babies and their mother,

27-year-old Mrs. Hedwig Hunsicker, from Germany, were transferred to Southampton, England's General Hospital maternity unit where a spokesman said all three were doing well.

ARTHRITIS

Low doses of chloroquine safe

Evidence that the antimalarial drug chloroquine—which is dangerous to the eyes—can be used as a treatment for rheumatoid arthritis over a long period without damaging the retina has been presented by two researchers at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation. The trick is to keep the dosage low.

Reported in the Aug. 8 issue of *MEDICAL TRIBUNE*, a study of 28 chronic active rheumatoid arthritis patients showed no retinal damage over a period of 7 to 11 years. Total doses were more than a kilogram.

Drs. Allen H. Mackenzie and Arthur L. Scherbel explain that the maximum daily dose in the patients was 1.72 milligrams of chloroquine phosphate per pound of body weight, or 3.24 milligrams hydroxychloroquine sulfate per pound.

HEART

Improved artificial valve

Rigorous tests of a new artificial heart valve in calves have shown it to be more durable and less likely to cause blood clots than other flap valves.

Jeweled bearings and an airfoil are two features of the valve now undergoing development and experimental trials in nine animals at the National Heart Institute, Bethesda, Md.

The valve's moving part is a central plastic disk placed against an inner rim to prevent the backward flow of blood, but swinging open in response to forward flow.

The disk is attached to a metal axle with conical ends projecting beyond each edge of the disk. These axle ends pivot in a pair of sapphire bearings.

To eliminate areas of relatively stagnant blood with its propensity for forming clots, the pivot points are exposed to constant washing action of blood even when the valve is closed.

Drs. William S. Pierce, Douglas M. Behrendt and Andrew G. Morrow of the surgery branch of NHI describe the tests in the August issue of the *JOURNAL OF THORACIC AND CARDIOVASCULAR SURGERY*.

POLIO

Voting booths used for shots

Voting booths in Nicaragua have been put into the service of the public health. They were converted into vaccination posts following a recent outbreak of polio.

In 12 days, officials used the 1,572 electoral district boards to vaccinate all children from three months to 15 years old. Other countries contributed 825,000 doses of vaccine, delivered by the World Health Organization regional office.

Although the northern hemisphere has virtually wiped out polio, it is rising again in the tropics.

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