

More Drug Deformities

➤ SCIENCE appears to be falling down through drugs on alleviating the discomforts of pregnancy. More drug investigations are under way as deformities threaten babies.

Again the British Medical Journal, which alerted Dr. Frances O. Kelsey, the Food and Drug Administration citation-winning physician, to the dangers of thalidomide, has sparked an international investigation into the possible dangers of another apparently innocent drug.

Preludin, marketed in the United States by Geigy Pharmaceuticals, Ardsley, N. Y., since 1956 and approved by FDA, is suspected of causing deformities in two babies whose mothers took the drug to keep their weight down.

Dr. Ralph G. Smith, acting director of the Bureau of Medicine of FDA, told SCIENCE SERVICE that although there was not a strong case against Preludin on the basis of the deformities (diaphragmatic hernias), which

are not rare, FDA is trying to get more information.

"It might be wise for physicians to prescribe as few drugs as possible for pregnant women until we know more about the effect," he said.

Dr. Kelsey said that Preludin and other suspected drugs have posed a "difficult problem" that was out of her "territory."

Especially difficult is the case of Postafen, an anti-seasickness drug now banned by Sweden, Norway and Denmark without prescription.

The FDA can make no comment on Postafen because it is not known by that name in the U.S., and there are said to be several chemical formulas used under that trade name.

Obstetricians so far have reported no deformities among American babies whose mothers have taken approved drugs for nausea and weight control in pregnancy.

• Science News Letter, 82:371 December 8, 1962

Iodides May Be Dangerous

➤ DRUGS containing iodine for treatment of asthma in pregnant women are believed to have caused the formation of fatal goiters in two babies.

Potassium iodide, commonly given by physicians either alone or in combination with other compounds for asthma, apparently reached the two infants through the placenta, the organ that develops on the wall of the uterus during pregnancy. Both were born with large goiters and died within a day or two after birth.

Three New York physicians reporting in the New England Journal of Medicine, 267: 1124, 1962, warned that many commonly used drugs contain iodides (iodine compounds) and are known to doctors only by their trade names.

"The physician must know the essential ingredients of all drugs administered during pregnancy and also be sure that drugs are adequately tested by the drug manufacturers for use during pregnancy," the investigators advised.

Quadrinal, manufactured by the Knoll Pharmaceutical Company of Orange, N. J., was the drug prescribed for the two mothers who lost their babies with goiter. It contains a combination of potassium iodide, ephedrine hydrochloride, phenobarbital and theophylline calcium salicylate. One of the mothers also took Medrol, produced by Upjohn Company of Kalamazoo, Mich., which contains only methylprednisolone, a steroid compound.

Although safe for the mothers, the drugs containing iodide apparently caused harm to the small developing embryos. The main problem was to maintain adequate airways after the babies were born. Neither operation on the windpipe (tracheotomy) nor administration of oxygen could save the newborn infants. The mechanism by which

iodine causes goiter is not well understood.

Drs. Morton P. Galina and Norman L. Avnet of Bronx Municipal Hospital Center, and Dr. Arnold Einhorn of Lincoln Hospital, all in New York, reported the cases.

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ANTHROPOLOGY

Insects Show Migration Of Polynesian People

➤ A CLUE to the origins and migrations of the Polynesians may well be found in an exhaustive study of the mosquitoes associated with them.

Dr. John N. Belkin, entomologist at the University of California at Los Angeles, in a study of South Pacific mosquitoes finds that the Polynesians brought few, if any, mosquitoes with them into the South Pacific. The mosquitoes already there became associated with these people, then were dispersed widely, but for only short distances, by them.

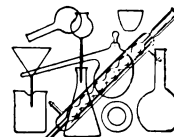
Dr. Belkin's studies have already revealed obvious correlations in the migration of Polynesians and mosquito distributions.

Micronesians are also thought to have played a small role in the distribution of mosquitoes in this general area.

The report published by the University of California Press indicates that the mosquitoes introduced to new areas most often and in the largest numbers are those whose immature stages can live in natural or artificial containers. These mosquitoes can produce several generations aboard ship during a trip, then disembark to establish new infestations. The role of man in such dispersal is not thoroughly evaluated in the report, but is important.

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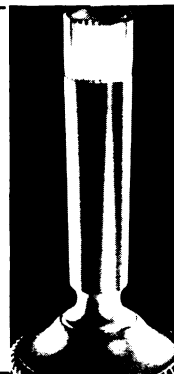
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