

MEDICINE

Doctors Are Reading—

Surgery for Asthma Patients

► PATIENTS with intractable asthma that cannot be relieved in the usual ways were reported responsive to surgery in the Journal of the American Medical Association, 180:809, 1962.

In the past three and a half years, the treatment of 160 patients with intractable asthma has included surgery. Dr. Richard H. Overholt, thoracic surgeon, New England Deaconess Hospital and New England Baptist Hospital, Boston, said none had responded satisfactorily to other therapy. This included desensitization, changes in climate, bronchodilators, expectorants, steroids, respiratory assistance in various ways, tracheostomy, psychotherapy and electric shock.

The operation removed the carotid body, a structure about the size of a grain of rice, which lies at the fork of the common carotid artery on either side of the neck. Three of the 160 had both carotid bodies removed.

Local anesthesia was used, and some patients reported noticeable relief either after novocain was injected into the carotid body, or at the instant of removal by surgery.

Dr. Overholt explained that removal of a carotid body in an asthmatic patient may quiet an "oversensitive reflex" without producing measurable ill effects.

Epilepsy Treatment

Ethosuximide (Zarontin) was shown to be effective in epilepsy in two studies reported from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, and from the department of neurology, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, New York.

The type of epileptic seizure for which ethosuximide has been more successful than other treatments is "petit mal," which consists of transient lapses of consciousness, usually lasting five to 30 seconds.

Ethosuximide is one of three succinimides. (A succinimide is prepared by heating succinic acid in a current of ammonia.)

Although some side effects were noted in treating patients with ethosuximide, they were less toxic than in reports of phenoximide (trade name, Milontin) and methsuximide (Celontin), the researchers said.

In a preliminary report (p. 822), Drs. Samuel Livingston, Lydia Pauli and Amir Najmabadi of Johns Hopkins said that ethosuximide was given to 21 patients who suffered very frequent spells of petit mal, averaging from 15 to 50 a day. All had been previously treated with trimethadione (Tridione) without benefit.

The other report (p. 840), from New York, by Drs. Eli S. Goldensohn and John Hardie, with Edna D. Borea, said ethosuximide was effective with 100 patients with mostly typical petit mal attacks. They believe this to be the drug of choice, although both teams of investigators plan further studies.

Tetanus Immunization Urged

A plea for all physicians to participate in an active campaign for nation-wide tetanus (lockjaw) control was made by Drs. Wesley Furste, Edward Farnham and L. Chandler Roettig of the Ohio State University College of Medicine, Columbus (p. 837).

"In these days of numerous automobile collisions, burns, the occasional airplane crash, and other accidents, deep wounds occur in which tetanus toxin can be produced," the doctors said. "In addition to such nonmilitary accidents, there is now the fearful possibility of nuclear warfare with many thousands of casualties."

Most children and young adults are routinely immunized by the general practitioner and pediatrician, the researchers pointed out, but middle-aged persons and others who have not been in the military service are largely overlooked.

The doctors studied 11,715 admissions to the emergency department of White Cross Hospital and Riverside Methodist Hospital, Columbus, from Jan. 1 to Nov. 1, 1961. Of these, 3,155 were considered to be cases in which tetanus could occur.

Nursing the Baby

A "cold impersonal bottle with a rubber tire at the end of it" is a poor substitute for the mother's breast, Dr. Ashley Montagu of Princeton University commented in an article on natural selection and the form of the breast in the human female (p. 826).

• Science News Letter, 81:397 June 23, 1962

MEDICINE

Cobwebs Occur in Brain Before Baby Is Born

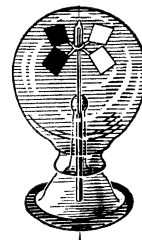
► COBWEBS in the brain usually are considered metaphorical, but the journal Nature, 194:880, 1962, has shown that advancing age or fuzzy-mindedness are not the only conditions in which the term is appropriate. "Arachnoidal" or cobweb-like cell clusters occur in the membrane covering of the brain of the unborn fetus.

In a series of post-mortems on infants, "milkspots" were observed in nearly two-thirds of the membranes of the stillborn and in about one-third of all those born alive. The cobweb-like cell clusters were more frequent in full-term infants but were noted also in premature fetuses.

Dr. James Watt of the department of pathology, University of Liverpool, reported that the significance of these cell clusters is uncertain, but in view of the fact that such clusters in man have generally been accepted as a sign of advancing age, he commented:

"In any event it would seem unnecessary at present to postulate that the human species may be afflicted with old age even from birth."

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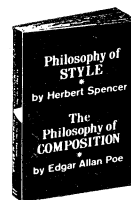
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