

Certification of Added Qualification in Geriatrics: The Academic Perspective

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On April 20, 1988, a new examination was administered to test for competency in geriatrics. Successful examinees will be given a "certificate of added qualifications," a name that specifically implies an added skill rather than a subspecialty status. To be eligible for the examination, candidates must be certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine or the American Board of Family Practice. The examination is the same for both specialties.

This new certification raises certain questions. Is it mainly intended as an academic title, for example, or will it be advantageous for practicing physicians to hold this certification? Will those certified be more employable in some spheres? Will physician selection by patients be influenced? Will certain faculty members be encouraged by their chairman to sit for this examination, and if so, which faculty members?

To obtain the viewpoints of academic leaders about such questions, the opinions of department chairmen of training programs were gathered by questionnaire and are reported here.

METHODS

A questionnaire was developed to obtain information relative to the certification examination in geriatrics. The questionnaire was pre-tested by 20 family medicine and internal medicine faculty at the University of Utah School of Medicine. After using their suggestions, a revised questionnaire was sent to all US family medicine ($n = 378$) and internal medicine ($n = 441$) program chairmen in October 1987. The survey was anonymous but coded so that nonrespondents could be sent another survey. A sec-

ond mailing was conducted in December 1987. The 12 items on the questionnaire were either of the yes-no or Likert scale-type, and comments were encouraged.

RESULTS

Surveys were received from 335 (89 percent) family medicine programs and 296 (67 percent) internal medicine programs. Almost all responding family medicine chairmen reported receiving information about the certificate of added qualifications (94 percent); proportionally fewer internal medicine chairmen reported receiving such information (79 percent). Of those family medicine and internal medicine chairmen who alleged receiving such information, fewer than one half felt it was adequate to help them make plans for their educational programs (family medicine: 31 percent adequate, 10 percent very adequate; internal medicine: 19 percent adequate, 8 percent very adequate).

Based on their present understanding, just over one half of the family medicine chairmen thought that adding this certificate was a positive contribution to medicine (39 percent positive, 15 percent very positive). One fourth thought it was a negative contribution (16 percent negative, 9 percent very negative), and one fifth thought it was neutral (21 percent). About the same proportion of the internal medicine chairmen thought the certificate was a positive contribution (36 percent positive, 12 percent very positive). One fifth thought it was negative (12 percent negative, 7 percent very negative), and one third, neutral (33 percent).

By and large, family medicine and internal medicine chairmen view the credential as much more important to faculty than to private practitioners; however, family medicine chairmen are more likely to encourage their own faculty to take the examination (82 percent) than internal medicine chairmen (55 percent). Of those family medicine chairmen who plan to encourage faculty to take the examination, 32 percent plan to select one faculty member with special interest in geriatrics, and 36 percent plan to select two or more faculty with special interest. Others

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(15 percent) plan to encourage all faculty, and 18 percent plan to take a "wait and see who chooses it" strategy. Of the internal medicine chairmen who plan to encourage faculty, 23 percent plan to select one person, 55 percent two or more, 9 percent everyone, and 13 percent plan to use the "wait and see" strategy.

In general, one half of the chairmen would be inclined to hire someone with the certificate over someone without it, assuming other qualifications are equal (family medicine: 41 percent yes, 9 percent strongly yes; internal medicine: 34 percent yes, 11 percent strongly yes). Neither group, however, thought that generalists would prefer to refer a patient to a holder of the certificate over a subspecialist who deals with the patient's problem (family medicine: 17 percent yes, 2 percent strongly yes; internal medicine: 22 percent yes, 1 percent strongly yes). Moreover, neither group strongly felt that certification would have an impact upon physician selection by patients (family medicine: 17 percent yes, 2 percent strongly yes; internal medicine: 22 percent yes, 2 percent strongly yes). Finally, neither group thought that the certificate of added qualifications would become of equal importance to other subspecialty boards (family medicine: 11 percent yes, 52 percent no, 37 percent don't know; internal medicine: 11 percent yes, 53 percent no, 36 percent don't know).

DISCUSSION

A divergence of opinion about the certification was found. There was even divergence about whether adequate infor-

mation was received about the examination, with just under one half of respondents feeling the information was adequate.

While the majority of respondents did not feel that the certification is highly important, about one half reported that for a teaching position they would hire a person holding the certificate over a person not holding the certificate if other qualifications were equal.

There is not an overwhelming feeling that this certification is a positive step. It would be interesting (though not possible from this study) to know whether chairmen with strong programs in geriatrics tend to feel that the step is positive. None of the comments on the questionnaire was enlightening about why the respondent did not feel this step to be positive.

Whatever else may be an outcome of this examination, it is fairly certain that the content of geriatrics as an academic discipline will become better defined. The content of the examination, whatever that may be, will be likely to have a strong influence on curriculum planning and content topics, probably bringing greater uniformity among programs in what is felt to be geriatrics. Program planners will have a focus for the teaching of geriatrics—that focus will be to prepare learners for the examination. It is likely that the rate of success of trainees on the examination will implicitly become a measure of the success of any given training program, an outcome that will justify the existence of the certificate.

If greater uniformity among programs and ease of planning a curriculum are outcomes of this certification examination, those benefits probably will justify the effort.

Index to Volume 26

Pages	Number	Date
1-112	1	January 1988
113-232	2	February 1988
233-352	3	March 1988
353-472	4	April 1988
473-600	5	May 1988
601-704	6	June 1988

SUBJECT INDEX

A

- ABSENTEEISM CERTIFICATION the physician's role (Mayhew & Nordlund) 651 commentary (Fried) 654
- ADRENAL GLAND HYPERTENSION acute and hyperglycemia (Tolbert) 78
- ADVANCE DIRECTIVES discussion with outpatients and physicians' attitudes and practices (Tunzi et al) 572
- ALCOHOLISM
questionnaire efficacy in a residency clinic (Maly) (Letter) 132 (Glaze) (Reply) 132
resident diagnosis in a family practice center (Woodall) 293
why physicians don't diagnose alcoholism in patients (Deisher) (Letter) 335
- ALLERGY FOOD and psychopathology (Seggev & Eckert) 161
- ALPHA-FETOPROTEIN TESTING on prenatal patients in family practice (Weiss) 273
- ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE truth telling and (Erde et al) 401 commentary (Brody) 404
- AMBULATORY EDUCATION resident development of clinical independence (Williamson Jr et al) 60
- AMNIOTIC FLUID detection of group B streptococcal infection in using latex fixation test (David & Henley) 569
- ANEURYSM splenic artery rupture (Williams) 73
- ANTIBIOTICS topical vs wound protectant and antiseptic on Staphylococcus-contaminated blister (Sheeler) (Letter) 16 (Leyden) (Reply) 16
- ASTHMA life threatening and combined inhalation of cromolyn sodium and metaproterenol sulfate in (Rogers) 193

B

- BALINT GROUPS lessons for American family medicine from England (Scheingold) 315
- BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE and family medicine (Shapiro) 583

- BLACKS hypertension in and drug treatment of (Saunders) 659
- BLOOD PRESSURE MONITOR automatic in primary care (Ornstein et al) 517
- BOOK REVIEWS
Atlas of Pediatric Physical Diagnosis (Zitelli & Davis) 104
The Care of Patients: Perspectives and Practices (Schwenk) 597
Case Presentations in Clinical Geriatric Medicine (Fox) 585
Clinical Electrocardiography: A Primary Care Approach (Grauer & Curry Jr) 225
Common Diagnostic Tests: Use and Interpretation (Driggers) 589
Cope's Early Diagnosis of the Acute Abdomen (Driggers) 588
Dear Doctor, A Personal Letter to a Physician (Smith) 597
Disorders of the Cervical Spine: Diagnosis and Medical Management (Bland) 104
Emergency Pediatrics: A Guide to Ambulatory Care (Heidrich) 586
Encounters Between Patients and Doctors: An Anthology (Stoeckle) 224
Family Medicine: A Guidebook for Practitioners of the Art (Shires et al) 102
Family Medicine: The Maturing of a Discipline (Mengel) 596
Handbook of Skin Clues of Systemic Diseases (Larsen) 588
Management of Hypertension (Kaplan) 102
Manual of Cardiac Arrhythmias (Chung) 221
Manual of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Therapeutics (Katz) 224
Manual of Pediatric Emergencies (Acheson) 585
The Neurologic Examination in Primary Care (Menden) 463

- Nutritional Influences on Illness: A Sourcebook of Clinical Research (Kahn) 596
 Obstetrical Decision Making (Friedman et al) 463
 Obstetrics and Gynecology (Norman) 588
 Office Management of Sports Injuries and Athletic Problems (Krause) 589
 Office Spirometry: A Practical Guide to the Selection and Use of Spirometers (Enright & Hyatt) 463
 Primary Care—Clinics in Office Practice: Office Laboratory Testing (Fischer & Addison) 225
 Primary Care Medicine: Office Evaluation and Management of the Adult Patient (Goroll et al) 221
 Primary Care of Cancer (Bass) 596
 Rhythm Quizlets: Self-Assessment (McArator) 586
 Soft Tissue Rheumatic Pain: Recognition, Management, Prevention (Rozendal) 585
 A Synopsis of Endocrinology and Metabolism (Ramsay) 224
 BREAST CANCER screening and early diagnosis (McLellan) 561

C

- CANCER endometrial screening for (Jaber) 67
 CARDIOVASCULAR RISK clinic visits following patient newsletter (Eggertsen et al) 85
 CELLULITIS microbiology of in adults (Lutomski et al) 45
 CERTIFICATION of added qualification in geriatrics (Goodenough & Whitman) 687
 CHLAMYDIA TRACHOMATIS pneumonia in children with pharyngitis (Reed et al) 387
 CHOLESTEROL serum reduction of using niacin and probucol (Cohen & Morgan) 145
 CHOLESTEROL ELEVATED management in a university-based family practice (Nichols) 281
 CLINICAL REVIEWS
 Detection of and screening for endometrial cancer (Jaber) 67
 Drug treatment considerations for the hypertensive black patient (Saunders) 659
 Erectile impotence: Evaluation and management (Heller & Gleich) 321
 Exercise stress testing (Richard & Birrer) 425
 A preventive approach to the suicidal patient (Pary et al) 185
 Screening and early diagnosis of breast cancer (McLellan) 561
 CODE STATUS discussion with outpatients and physician attitudes and practices (Tunzi et al) 571
 COFFEE AND HYPOKALEMIA (Rudy & Lee) 679

COMMUNICATION

- of deaf patients (McEwen & Anton-Culver) 289
 patient to physician on medication use (Penner) 82

CONTROVERSIES IN FAMILY PRACTICE

- Is drug treatment indicated for mild hypertension with diastolic blood pressure of 90–100 mmHg? An affirmative view (Moser) 449
 Is drug treatment indicated for mild hypertension with diastolic blood pressure of 90–100 mmHg? An opposing view (Aagaard) 455
 Is routine influenza immunization indicated for people over 65 years of age? An affirmative view (Thompson) 211
 Is routine influenza immunization indicated for people over 65 years of age? An opposing view (Frame) 215
 Screening flexible sigmoidoscopy: Is it worthwhile? An affirmative view and an opposing view (Varma) (Letter) 613 (Rodney) (Reply) 616 (Frame) (Reply) 616
 Should cholesterol-lowering drugs be used routinely to treat moderate hypercholesterolemia in patients with serum cholesterol levels of 6.20 to 6.85 mmol/L (240–265 mg/dL)? An affirmative view (Crouch) 665
 Should cholesterol-lowering drugs be used routinely to treat moderate hypercholesterolemia in patients with serum cholesterol levels of 6.20 to 6.85 mmol/L (240–265 mg/dL)? An opposing view (Zweig) 670
 COSTA RICA family medicine in (Baughan et al) 97
 COUNSELING for smoking cessation (DiFranza et al) 377
 CRITICAL CARE aggressive therapy in (Doukas) (Letter) 19
 CROMOLYN SODIUM combined inhalation with metaproterenol in life-threatening asthma (Rogers) 193
 CYTOLOGY CERVICAL improved cell yield with Cytobrush (Deckert et al) 639

D

- DEAFNESS medical communication of deaf patients (McEwen & Anton-Culver) 289
 DECISION MAKING evaluation of two tools in acute cardiac ischemia (Green & Smith) 627
 DILATION AND CURETTAGE a teaching model (Eggertsen & Gromko) 443
 DRUGS psychotropic prescriptions for nursing home residents (Burns & Kamerow) 155 commentary (Pattee) 158
 DRUG THERAPY patient-to-physician communication on medication use (Penner) 82

E

EDUCATION IN FAMILY PRACTICE

- Balint work in England: Lessons for American family medicine (Scheingold) 315
- The development of clinical independence: Resident-attending physician interactions in an ambulatory setting (Williamson Jr et al) 60
- Family medicine residency training—three or four years? (Ferentz et al) 415
- Hospital privileges for family physicians: Documentation of family practice residents' experiences in training (Schneeweiss et al) 178
- Obstetric ultrasound training for family physicians: Results for a multi-site study (Hahn et al) 553
- ENDOCARDITIS infective (Johnson) (Letter) 18
- ENDOMETRIAL CANCER screening for (Jaber) 67
- ERECTILE IMPOTENCE (Heller & Gleich) 321

F

FAMILY MEDICINE

- and behavioral science (Shapiro) 583
- faculty and resident practice patterns (Frey & Milligan) (Letter) 491
- in Costa Rica (Baughan et al) 97
- residency training (Ferentz et al) 415

FAMILY PHYSICIANS patient satisfaction with compared with general internists (Cherkin et al) 543

FAMILY PRACTICE

- and bulemia (Wells) (Letter) 495 (Zinkand) (Reply) 495
- and obstetrics (Rosenblatt) 127
- and obstetrics in Ohio (Smucker) 165
- approach to infertility (Frey et al) 499
- Papanicolaou smear technique in (Reissman) 525
- responses to questions by medical students (Scherger et al) 169

FAMILY PRACTICE AND THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

- Evaluating HMO/IPA for family physicians: One group's experiences (Cook & Rodnick) 325
- Impact of an HMO on a university-based family practice program (Curtis et al) 89 (Fields et al) (Letter) 613

FAMILY PRACTICE FORUM

- The maturing of family medicine: Challenges to behavioral science (Shapiro) 583

FAMILY PRACTICE GRAND ROUNDS

- Accidental hypothermia in the elderly (Celestino et al) 259

Infertility: A family practice approach (Frey et al) 499

Mastitis in lactating women (Ogle & Davis) 139

Smoking cessation counseling by family physicians (DiFranza et al) 377

Tourette's syndrome (Flynn et al) 27

FAMILY PRACTICE RESIDENCY diagnosis of alcoholism (Woodall) 293

FATIGUE a one-year follow-up of fatigued patients (Valdini et al) 33 commentary (Saultz) 37

FATTY LIVER acute in pregnancy associated with maternal and fetal metabolic acidosis (Werner et al) 198

FLOURIDE SUPPLEMENTATION (Fox) (Letter) 498 (Rigilano) (Reply) 498

FOOD ALLERGY and psychopathology (Seggev & Eckert) 161

FREON 12 use in treating verruca (McDow) (Letter) 18

G

GENERAL INTERNISTS patient satisfaction with compared with family physicians (Cherkin et al) 543

GENOGRAMS reading and interpreting (Like et al) 407

GERIATRICS certification of added qualification (Goodenough & Whitman) 687

H

HEALTH CARE DELIVERY in Nicaragua (Myer) (Letter) 19

HEALTH MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATIONS impact on a university-based family practice (Curtis et al) 89

HETEROPHILE ANTIBODIES and Rocky Mountain spotted fever (Bluestein) (Letter) 370

HMO/IPA

and the family physician (Bradley & Estes Jr) 257

contracts for family physicians (Cook & Rodnick) 325

HOME VISITS follow-up study in an urban program (Balaban et al) 307

HOSPITAL PRIVILEGES documentation of students' experiences in training (Schneeweiss et al) 178

HYPERCHOLESTEROLEMIA

recognition and treatment (Bell & Dippe) 507, commentary (Neighbor Jr) 511

should cholesterol-lowering drugs be used? An affirmative view (Crouch) 665

should cholesterol-lowering drugs be used? An opposing view (Zweig) 670

HYPERGLYCEMIA extreme and acute adrenal insufficiency (Tolbert) 78

HYPERTENSION

- mild treatment of—an affirmative view (Moser) 449
- mild treatment of—an opposing view (Aagaard) 455
- HYPERTENSION IN BLACKS drug treatment of (Saunders) 659
- HYPOKALEMIA AND COFFEE (Rudy & Lee) 679
- HYPOTHERMIA accidental in the elderly (Celestino et al) 259

I

- IMPOTENCE ERECTILE evaluation and management (Heller & Gleich) 321
- INFERTILITY a family practice approach (Frey et al) 499
- INFLUENZA VACCINATION (Brimberry) 397
- INFLUENZA VACCINE
 - routine indicated for people aged over 65 years—an affirmative view (Thompson) 221
 - routine indicated for people aged over 65 years—an opposing view (Frame) 215
- INSURANCE HEALTH physician knowledge and attitudes about after introduction of capitated health care plans (Ellsbury & Schneeweiss) 57
- INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES
 - Family medicine in Costa Rica: The beginning (Baughan et al) 97
- INTRAVENOUS ACCESS teaching central line placement (Eggertsen & Ellsbury) 342
- IPA/HMO
 - and the family physician (Bradley & Estes Jr) 257
 - contracts for family physicians (Cook & Rodnick) 325
- ISCHEMIA CARDIAC evaluation of two decision-support tools (Green & Smith) 627

L

- LACTATION mastitis in lactating women (Ogle & Davis) 139
- LEGIONELLA PNEUMOPHILA cause of acute lower respiratory infection (Guthrie et al) 633
- LOWER RESPIRATORY INFECTION Legionella pneumophila as the cause of (Guthrie et al) 633

M

- MANAGED HEALTH CARE
 - contracts for family physicians (Cook & Rodnick) 325
 - procedure selection in (Murray) 576
- MANAGED HEALTH CARE CONTRACTS and the family physician (Bradley & Estes Jr) 257
- MASTITIS IN LACTATING WOMEN (Ogle & Davis) 139

- METABOLIC ACIDOSIS associated with acute fatty liver of pregnancy (Werner et al) 198
- METAPROTERENOL SULFATE combined inhalation with cromolyn sodium (Rogers) 193
- MICROBIOLOGY of adult cellulitis (Lutomski et al) 45
- MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION
 - intravenous treatment with streptokinase (Henry & deGruy) 438
 - possible acute managing patient with (Ewy) 617
- MYCOPLASMA PNEUMONIAE in children with pharyngitis (Reed et al) 387

N

- NEONATAL parapertussis infection (Selbst & Goren) 336
- NIACIN use in reducing serum cholesterol (Cohen & Morgan) 145
- NICARAGUA health care in (Myer) (Letter) 19
- NICOTINE CHEWING GUM effectiveness and the influence of patient education (Cox & Grant) (Letter) 371 (Lawrence) (Letter) 613
- NURSING HOME RESIDENTS psychotropic drug prescriptions (Burns & Kamerow) 155 commentary (Pattee) 158

O

- OBSTETRICAL PRACTICE attrition from among family practice residency graduates (Tietze et al) 204
- OBSTETRICS
 - in family practice (Rosenblatt) 127
 - in Ohio (Smucker) 165
 - ultrasound training (Hahn et al) 553

P

- PANIC DISORDER
 - the importance of phenomenology (Katon) 23
 - the sequence of panic symptoms (Katerndahl) 49
- PANANICOLAOU SMEAR SCREENING (Pederson) (Letter) 592
- PAPANICOLAOU SMEAR TECHNIQUES in a family practice setting (Reissman) 525
- PAPANICOLAOU SMEARS improved endocervical cell yield with Cytobrush (Deckert et al) 639
- PARAPERTUSSIS INFECTION in a neonate (Selbst & Goren) 336
- PATIENT EDUCATION
 - clinic visits following patient newsletter discussing cardiovascular risks (Eggertsen et al) 85
 - effectiveness with nicotine chewing gum (Cox & Grant) (Letter) 371 (Lawrence) (Letter) 613

PATIENT SATISFACTION and resident skill in communicating information (Falvo & Tippy) 643

PHARYNGITIS
 management of (Wald) 367
 prevalence of Chlamydia trachomatis and Mycoplasma in children (Reed et al) 387

PHARYNGITIS STREPTOCOCCAL evaluating rapid method for diagnosing in office laboratory (Bushek) (Letter) 374 (Wright et al) (Reply) 464

PHENOMENOLOGY the importance of in panic disorder (Katon) 23

PHYSICIAN
 patient medications and patient-to-physician communication on medication use (Penner) 82
 patient relationship in patient (Wall) (Letter) 134

PHYSICIAN GROUP HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS physician knowledge and attitudes about health insurance after introduction of capitated health care plans (Ellsbury & Schneeweiss) 57

PRACTICE STANDARDS and evaluation of primary care physicians (Rethans) (Letter) 248 (Lawler) (Reply) 248

PREGNANCY
 management and outcome of prolonged in community hospitals (Crump) 41
 outcome and process assessment of postdate in community hospitals (Crump) 41

PRENATAL PATIENTS alpha-fetoprotein testing on in family practice (Weiss) 273

PREPAID HEALTH CARE patient satisfaction in (Murray) 576

PREVENTION OF SUICIDE (Pary et al) 185

PRIMARY CARE automatic blood pressure monitor in (Ornstein et al) 517

PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS evaluation of practice standards (Rethans) (Letter) 248 (Lawler) (Reply) 248

PROBUCOL use in reducing serum cholesterol (Cohen & Morgan) 145

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY and food allergy (Seggev & Eckert) 161

PSYCHOSOCIAL INSTRUMENTS stress in the clinical setting (Frank & Zyzanski) 533

PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS screening for in primary care (Hase & Luger) 297

PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS prescriptions for nursing home residents (Burns & Kamerow) 155 commentary (Pattee) 158

Q

QUALITY OF MEDICAL CARE patients' perspective (Ware Jr) 489

R

RADIOLOGY diagnostic x-ray and effect of facility on use in family practice (Halvorsen) (Letter) 134

RESIDENCY TRAINING
 in family medicine (Ferentz et al) 415
 teaching central line placement and other options for intravenous access (Eggertsen & Ellsbury) 342

RESIDENT communication skills and patient satisfaction and adherence (Falvo & Tippy) 643

RESIDENT EDUCATION development of clinical independence (Williamson Jr et al) 60

RESIDENT EXPERIENCES documentation of for hospital privileges (Schneeweiss et al) 178

RETINOBLASTOMA and family crisis (Saultz et al) 621

RISK cardiovascular and clinic visits following patient newsletter (Eggertsen et al) 85

ROCKY MOUNTAIN SPOTTED FEVER heterophile antibodies in (Bluestein) (Letter) 370

S

SACCULATION OF THE PREGNANT UTERUS recurrent (McGann & Griffin) 339

SATISFACTION PATIENT
 comparison in prepaid and fee-for-service patients (Murray) 576
 with family physicians and general internists (Cherkin et al) 543

SCREENING
 and early diagnosis of breast cancer (McLellan) 561
 for endometrial cancer (Jaber) 67

SCREENING FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS in primary care (Hase & Luger) 297

SIGMOIDOSCOPY FLEXIBLE is screening worthwhile? An affirmative view and an opposing view (Varma) (Letter) 614 (Rodney) (Reply) 616 (Frame) (Reply) 616 An Opposing view (Hahn) (Letter) 494

SOMATIZATION DISORDER in a family practice (Replogle & Eicke) (Letter) 250 (deGruy) (Reply) 252 (Erratum) 613

STAPHYLOCOCCAL CONTAMINATED BLISTER comparison of topical antibiotics wound protectants and antiseptics (Sheeler) (Letter) 16 (Leyden) (Reply) 16

STREPTOCOCCAL INFECTION GROUP B diagnosis of using latex fixation test (David & Henley) 569

STREPTOKINASE intravenous for the treatment of acute myocardial infarction (Henry & deGruy) 438

STRESS in clinical setting and brief encounter psychological instrument (Frank & Zyzanski) 533

STRESS TESTING exercise (Richard & Birrer) 425

STUDENTS' MEDICAL responses to questions from about
family practice (Scherger et al) 169
SUICIDE prevention of (Pary et al) 185

T

TOURETTE'S SYNDROME Gilles de la Tourette disease
(Flynn et al) 27
TRUTH TELLING and Alzheimer's disease (Erde et al) 401
commentary (Brody) 404

U

ULTRASOUND TRAINING in obstetrics (Hahn et al) 553
UNIVERSITY-BASED FAMILY PRACTICE impact of HMO
on (Curtis et al) 89 (Fields et al) (Letter) 613

V

VACCINATION FOR INFLUENZA (Brimberry) 397

AUTHOR INDEX

A

Aagaard, George N 455
Aluise, John 89
Andolsek, Kathryn 499
Anton-Culver, Hoda 289
Athens, William J 633

B

Balaban, Donald J 307
Baskin, William N 198
Baughan, David M 97
Beasley, John W 169
Bell, Marvin Moe 507
Birrer, Richard 425
Blossom, H John 572
Bluestein, Daniel 370
Bontrager, Roy R 633
Bradley, Don W 257
Brannon, Ruth 89
Brenes, Mayra Cartin 97
Brimberry, Ronald 397
Brody, Howard 404
Brose, John 633
Bugerin-Viera, Magdalena 553
Burns, Barbara J 155
Bushek, Stephen 374

C

Cable, Thomas A 613
Carlson, Barbara Lepidus 307
Celestino, Frank S 259
Cherkin, Daniel C 543
Clack, Susan 621
Cohen, Louis 145
Colgan, Richard 415
Commerford, Kate 621
Cook, Joseph V 325

Cox, Jack L 371
Crabtree, Benjamin 464
Crouch, Michael A 665
Crump, William J 41
Curry, Hiram B 553
Curtis, Peter 89

D

David, David R 569
Davies, Allyson Ross 489
Davies, Terence C 553
Davis, Susan 139
Deckert, James J 639
deGruy, Frank 252, 438
Deisher, Joseph B 335
DiFranza, Joseph R 377
Dippe, Stephen Eric May
Dodson, William 499
Doukas, David J 19
Draeger, Steven 633

E

Eckert, R Christa 161
Eggertsen, Sam C 85, 342, 443
Ehemann, Larry J 498
Eichmann, Robert E 198
Eicke, F J 250
Ellsbury, Kathleen 57, 178, 342
Erde, Edmund L 401
Estes, E Harvey Jr 257
Ewy, Gordon A 617

F

Falvo, Donna 643
Ferentz, Kevin Scott 415
Fields, Karl B 613
Flynn, Stephen P 27

Fox, Gary N 498
Frame, Paul S 215, 616
Frank, Scott Howard 533
Frey, Donald 491
Frey, Keith 499
Fried, Robert A 654
Friedler, Edward 498

G

Garr, David R 553
Gaskins, Samuel E 204
Glaze, Lee W 132
Gleich, Paul 321
Glenn, John K 60
Goldfarb, Neil I 307
Gomez, Rodrigo Cedeno 97
Goodenough, Gerald K 687
Gordon, Katherine C 178
Gore, Ed 178
Goren, Stanley E 336
Grant, David 371
Greaves, Lyman B Jr 169
Green, Lee 627
Griffin, William T 339
Gromko, Linda J 443
Guinter, William 27
Guthrie, Robert 633

H

Hahn, David 494
Hahn, Ricardo G 553
Halvorsen, John G 134
Hart, L Gary 543
Hase, Harold D 297
Heffelfinger, John 633
Heller, John E 321
Henley, Charles E 569
Henry, Richard 438

Ho, Sam 553
Hood, John 553
Huck, Werner 387

J

Jaber, Raja 67
Jacobs, Irwin 27
Jaffe, Arnold 33
Johnson, Mark 16

K

Kamerow, Douglas B 155
Katerndahl, David A 49
Katon, Wayne 23
Klein, Jonathan 499

L

Langlois, John 553
Lawler, Frank 248
Lawrence, Duane A 613
Lee, Sung 679
Leyden, James J 16
Like, Robert C 407
Lippmann, Steven 185
Litchfield, Laurann 517
Luger, Joseph A 297
Lutomski, Dave M 45
Lutz, Lawrence Joseph 387

M

Maly, Rose C 132
Markert, Gary 517
Mayhew, Harry E 651
McDow, Ronald A 18
McEwen, Ellen 289
McGann, K Patricia 339
McGinnis, Mary Joyce 204
McGoldrick, Monica 407
McLeary, Richard D 553
McLellan, Garey L 561
Milligan, Steven L 491
Miraglia Colleen P 259
Miyagawa, Clyde I 45
Montano, Daniel 178
Morgan, Julie 145
Morgan, Walter 553
Moser, Barbara E 377
Moser, Marvin 449
Murray, James P 576
Myer, R Ed 19

N

Nadal, Evan C 401
Neighbor, William E Jr 511

Nichols, Andrew W 281
Nordlund, Daniel J 651

O

O'Brien, John M 553
O'Conner, Patrick 464
O'Handley, John 633
Ockene, Judith K 377
Ogle, Karen S 139
Olenick, Jeffrey 621
Ornstein, Steven M 517, 553
Osborn, Lucy M 278

P

Palermo, Vincent 639
Pary, Raymond 185
Pattee, James J 158
Pederson, Chris 592
Peggs, James F 553
Penner, Maurice 82
Perkel, Robert L 307

R

Reed, Barbara Diane 387
Reid, John C 60
Reinhardt, Robert 553
Reissman, Steven E 525
Replogle, William H 250
Rethans, J J 248
Richard, David 425
Rigilano, John C 498
Rivera, Jose O 45
Rodney, Wm MacMillan 169, 553, 616
Rodnick, Jonathan E 325
Rogers, John C 193, 407
Roi, Larry D 553
Rosenblatt, Roger A 127, 543
Rudy, David R 679
Runyon, Jill M 45

S

Saultz, John W 37, 621
Saunders, Elijah 659
Scheingold, Lee 315
Scherger, Joseph E 169
Schneeweiss, Ronald 57, 178
Scholl, Theresa O 401
Schultz, Janet 85
Seggev, Joram S 161
Selbst, Steven M 336
Shapiro, Johanna 583
Sheeler, Robert D 16
Sheets, Kent J 553
Sickles, R Trent 633

Sloat, Susan 89
Smith, Mindy 627
Smucker, Douglas R 165
Sobal, Jeffery 415
Staneck, Joseph L 45
Staten, Stephen F 639
Steinhardt, Susan 33
Swee, David E 169

T

Taylor, Dennis A 613
Thompson, Mason P 211
Tietze, Paul E 204
Timon, Tomie 553
Tippy, Penelope 643
Tobias, Carmelita R 185
Tolbert, Lakey W 78
Tomlinson, Tom 404
Troitt, Alexander T 45
Tsou, Carole V 169
Tunzi, Marc 572

V

Valdini, Anthony F 33
Valicenti, Jeanne 33
Van Noord, Glenn R 259
Varma, J R 614
Vincent, Chris 85
Von Clemm, Tina 89

W

Wald, Ellen R 367
Wall, Eric M 134
Ware, John E Jr 489
Weiss, Barry D 273
Wells, Elizabeth J 495
Werner, Carl J 198
White, Marion F 89
Whitman, Neal 687
Williams, James J 73
Williamson, Harold A Jr 60, 494
Wollitzer, Alison Okada 572
Woodall, Hunter E 293
Wright, Adrienne 464

Z

Zazove, Philip 387
Zemp, Lois 517
Zinkand, Heidi 495
Zoller, Dennis P 198
Zweig, Steven 670
Zyzanski, Stephen J 533

Family Medicine: The Maturing of a Discipline. *William J. Doherty, Charles E. Christianson, Marvin B. Sussman, (eds.). The Haywood Press, New York, 1987, 236 pp., \$34.95.*

The stated purpose of this book is to judge the progress the field of family medicine has made in the past two decades. To accomplish this task the editors have assembled a large group of authors to "assess the major issues in family medicine." Issues addressed include education, research, the consumer's perspective, alternative health care movements, and several chapters evaluating the field of family medicine overall. Unfortunately, important clinical and economic issues receive little attention.

As could be expected, given the long list of authors, chapters in this book vary tremendously in quality. Unfortunately, many of the authors simply state their ideas and desires on how family medicine should develop without the benefit of a thorough analysis of the data that are available. Others base their analysis on superficial genetic or familial analogies that are also not based on a thorough data analysis. Although many of the authors are able to identify the critical tensions within the area they analyzed, there is little coherent synthesis of those tensions into a firm statement on where family medicine is currently and where we ought to be heading in the future. In addition, at the end of the book, after all the various issues have been addressed, no attempt is made to tie together all the various themes into overall conclusions on the development of family medicine. Finally, many portions of the book are redundant, and illustrations are few and of poor quality.

Several chapters deserve special mention. Dougherty, Baird, and Becker's chapter on the biopsychosocial model's integration into the practice of family medicine is a true gem. Culpepper and Becker's analysis of family medicine research is similarly well-grounded in data and offers the reader a meaningful analysis of the status of family medicine research. Lastly, Cogswell, Aluisse, Shahady, and Thomas's chapter on family medicine from the consumer's per-

spective reminds family physicians that they are not so closely in touch with consumer's needs as they might assume, supporting that conclusion with data and a meaningful analysis.

In summary, this book does not subject the field of family medicine to the kind of penetrating analysis that Paul Starr performed on the entire field of medicine in his book entitled *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. Rather than being a competent reflection upon the field of family medicine based on the data and experience we have accumulated over the past 20 years, this book often only offers the reader a series of truisms and weak analogies. Thus, although this book may prove useful to academic family physicians who may find the chapters on research and education useful, the book will probably not be useful to family physicians in general or members of the public who wish to gain an understanding of family medicine.

*Mark B. Mengel, MD, MPH
University of Oklahoma
Oklahoma City*

Primary Care of Cancer. *Edward A. Mortimer, Jr. (ed), Joseph Robinson, Stephen H. Smookler (assoc eds). Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Cleveland, 1987, 195 pp., \$15 (paper).*

This short, very readable text is intended for a wide audience, from the medical student and primary care resident to the practicing primary care health provider. It is divided into 29 chapters, each of which describes a specific type of neoplasm, beginning with the urinary bladder and ending with Wilm's tumor.

Each chapter is subdivided into approximately ten segments, which include a general description, epidemiology and risk factors, etiology, prevention, screening, symptoms and signs, diagnostic tests, treatment, prognosis and post-treatment follow-up. Each chapter describes the appropriate staging nomenclature. The chapters are only a few pages in length and the printing is large. Exceptional effort is made to provide a concise

overview of each topic without getting bogged down in specifics. The final chapter covers home care of the terminally ill patient. There are five general references in the appendix.

The book appears to meet the editor's objectives quite adequately, not as an exhaustive text, but as a brief overview of the 30 most commonly reported malignancies, with special emphasis on screening, prevention, diagnosis, and team management. It should prove to be a handy supplement to any medical library.

*Robert L. Bass, MD
University of Nebraska
Medical Center
Omaha*

Nutritional Influences on Illness: A Sourcebook of Clinical Research. *Melvyn R. Werbach. Third Line Press, Tarzana, California, 1987, 498 pp., \$49.95. ISBN 0-9618550-0-2.*

When used as intended by the author, this hardbound reference will be of great value to the family physician who is interested in using appropriate and safe nutritional therapy. Clinicians frequently refrain from prescribing nutritional therapy because of the confusion that results from contradictory studies and philosophical differences among leaders in the field of clinical nutrition. In this volume Dr. Werbach presents a practical, disease-oriented, balanced guide to research on 92 common diseases. Each chapter presents a series of statements concerning a specific disease and nutrients relevant to that disease, with each statement followed by selected abstracts from the literature either substantiating or refuting it. This presentation allows the clinician to make decisions about nutrition therapy based on the strength of the scientific evidence.

The volume also contains fairly good sections in an appendix including "Common Nutritional Deficiencies," "Dangers of Nutritional Supplementation," "Guidelines to Nutritional Supplementation," "Laboratory Methods for Nutritional Evaluation," "Nutrient Bioavailability and Interactions," and "Syn-

dromes due to Abnormal Tissue Nutrient Levels."

What makes this book particularly valuable is its organization by specific disease and its succinct review of the literature. The author makes several suggestions for the appropriate use of this book in deciding the value of nutritional interventions compared with other therapeutic options. Practicing family physicians and family practice residents could use this book in making such therapeutic decisions, while medical students and allied health professionals would find this to be a valuable educational resource. As with most nutrition resources, it will be important for the author to update this sourcebook frequently if it is to remain relevant and useful.

Ronald Arlo Kahn, MD
Little Rock, Arkansas

The Care of Patients: Perspectives and Practices. Mack Lipkin. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987, 235 pp., \$10.95 (paper). ISBN 0-300-03771-6.

When the original edition of this book was published in 1974, I would have applauded its stirring and idealistic wisdom about humane and compassionate personal medical care. The medical world was reveling in a biotechnological orgy that discounted the importance of psychosocial forces in the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of suffering and illness. The development of family practice was in its early stages, its future unclear. This book, with its emphasis on "the importance of humanistic qualities in the relationship between physician and patient," would have served as a guide for medical students and residents pursuing a counterprevailing professional value system.

Now, 15 years later, the book is no less wise, but the environment has changed. Biomedical reductionism continues, but compassionate, personal medical care exists, albeit in less-than-adequate quantities. Family practice is a thriving and established specialty that has as its *raison d'être* the practice of comprehensive and compassionate personal medical care. Thousands of family practice resi-

dency graduates practice Dr. Lipkin's advice on a daily basis. Compelling importance of caring and compassionate concern has not influenced all of medicine, but strong role models and training programs exemplifying this ideal are readily available to those students and residents who seek it. Dr. Lipkin's message, once unconventional and controversial, is now widely accepted, if not always demonstrated, by mainstream medical practice.

This book can be recommended to medical students as a wise and scholarly discussion of the subtleties, richness, and power of the physician-patient relationship, but a month spent with a wise and scholarly family physician would be a more powerful educational experience.

Thomas Schwenk, MD
University of Michigan
Medical School
Ann Arbor

Dear Doctor, A Personal Letter To A Physician. Charles E. Odegaard, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Menlo Park, California, 1986, 172 pp., \$3 (paper).

Dear Dr. Odegaard,

Since your book was written as a personal letter, I would like to respond in the same spirit. My formative years in medicine were spent at your great university. At the time you were president, I was too junior to think of communicating with anyone in authority, let alone the president, on any issue of substance. Now that I have been asked to review your book for the main journal in my discipline, I would like to summon the courage to answer your letter.

I believe that your book (with the exception of Appendix 1) should be read by family practice faculty members and by practicing family physicians. Selected parts of it would be useful for students and residents. Strangely, first-year students appear to be the most open and would be most receptive to your book. Especially recommended are your 1952 address to the American Council of Learned Societies and your chapter entitled "Rise of Heresy." You might be interested to know that for many

years at the University of Washington while teaching the Introduction to Clinical Medicine course to freshmen medical students (during your tenure), we had a session given by one of the professors of Comparative Literature. This was always my personal favorite, though the students were generally split (between Flexnerians and post-Flexnerians?).

Of great interest was your critique of the GPEP report. You pointed out it was regrettable that GPEP did not more explicitly and vigorously invite debate on the personal qualities, values, and attitudes appropriate to physicians. This startled me and made me go back and review GPEP. I was also envious of the attention given to the Board of Internal Medicine's *Guide to Awareness and Evaluation of Humanistic Qualities in the Internist*. I particularly enjoyed the recounting of your personal conversations with Flexner.

You called for acceptance by physicians of the need to broaden the base to include at least from the humanities and social sciences knowledge about "(1) man's social and personal life relevant to disease and illness in the presenting patient, (2) an expanded rational analysis of the doctor-patient relationship, and (3) ethical issues in medicine." This speaks very clearly to family medicine and provides one of the best statements of the intellectual underpinning of our discipline that I have seen.

I will admit that the article in the appendix by Schwartz and Wiggins confused me. However, the historical perspective, your explanation of Flexnerian and post-Flexnerian thought, and the philosophy of interweaving the humanities and social sciences with biologic medicine rang true. Our own department is in the process of creating a Division of Humanities and Education.

Thank you for taking the trouble to write this book. I believe members of our discipline will learn from it.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

Charles Kent Smith, MD
Eastern Virginia Medical School
Norfolk

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INDICATIONS AND USAGE: ERYC is indicated in children and adults for the treatment of the following conditions:

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Lower respiratory tract infections of mild to moderate severity caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes* (group A beta hemolytic streptococci); *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (*Diplococcus pneumoniae*).

Respiratory tract infections due to *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* (Eaton's agent).

Pertussis (whooping cough) caused by *Bordetella pertussis*. Erythromycin is effective in eliminating the organism from the nasopharynx of infected individuals, rendering them noninfectious. Some clinical studies suggest that erythromycin may be helpful in the prophylaxis of pertussis in exposed susceptible individuals.

Diphtheria—As an adjunct to antitoxin in infections due to *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*, to prevent establishment of carriers and to eradicate the organism in carriers.

Erythrasma—In the treatment of infections due to *Corynebacterium minutissimum*.

Intestinal amebiasis caused by *Entamoeba histolytica* (oral erythromycins only). Extraenteric amebiasis requires treatment with other agents. Infections due to *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Skin and soft tissue infections of mild to moderate severity caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes* and *Staphylococcus aureus* (resistant staphylococci may emerge during treatment).

Primary syphilis caused by *Treponema pallidum*. Erythromycin (oral forms only) is an alternate choice of treatment for primary syphilis in patients allergic to the penicillins. In treatment of primary syphilis, spinal fluid should be examined before treatment and as part of the follow-up after therapy. The use of erythromycin for the treatment of *in utero* syphilis is not recommended. (See CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY in full prescribing information.)

Erythromycins are indicated for treatment of the following infections caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis*: conjunctivitis of the newborn, pneumonia of infancy, urogenital infections during pregnancy. When tetracyclines are contraindicated or not tolerated, erythromycin is indicated for the treatment of uncomplicated urethral, endocervical, or rectal infections in adults due to *Chlamydia trachomatis*.

Legionnaires' disease caused by *Legionella pneumophila*. Although no controlled clinical efficacy studies have been conducted, *in vitro* and limited preliminary clinical data suggest that erythromycin may be effective in treating Legionnaires' disease.

Therapy with erythromycin should be monitored by bacteriological studies and by clinical response (See CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY—Microbiology in full prescribing information).

Injectable benzathine penicillin G is considered by the American Heart Association to be the drug of choice in the treatment and prevention of streptococcal pharyngitis and in long-term prophylaxis of rheumatic fever. When oral medication is preferred for treatment of the above conditions, penicillin G, V, or erythromycin are alternate drugs of choice.

Although no controlled clinical efficacy trials have been conducted, erythromycin has been suggested by the American Heart Association and the American Dental Association for use in a regimen for prophylaxis against bacterial endocarditis in patients allergic to penicillin who have congenital and/or rheumatic or other acquired valvular heart disease when they undergo dental procedures and surgical procedures of the upper respiratory tract. (Erythromycin is not suitable prior to genitourinary surgery where the organisms likely to lead to bacteremia are gram-negative bacilli or the enterococcal group of streptococci).

NOTE: When selecting antibiotics for the prevention of bacterial endocarditis the physician or dentist should read the full joint 1984 statement of the American Heart Association and the American Dental Association.

CONTRAINDICATION: ERYC is contraindicated in patients with known hypersensitivity to this antibiotic.

WARNING: There have been a few reports of hepatic dysfunction, with or without jaundice, occurring in patients receiving erythromycin ethylsuccinate, base, and stearate products.

PRECAUTIONS: Caution should be exercised when erythromycin is administered to patients with impaired hepatic function (see CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY, in full prescribing information, and WARNING).

Erythromycin use in patients who are receiving high doses of theophylline may be associated with an increase in serum theophylline levels and potential theophylline toxicity. In case of theophylline toxicity and/or elevated serum theophylline levels, the dose of theophylline should be reduced while the patient is receiving concomitant erythromycin therapy.

Erythromycin interferes with the fluorometric determination of urinary catecholamines.

Prolonged or repeated use of erythromycin may result in an overgrowth of nonsusceptible bacteria or fungi. If superinfection occurs, erythromycin should be discontinued and appropriate therapy instituted.

When indicated, incision and drainage or other surgical procedures should be performed in conjunction with antibiotic therapy.

Pregnancy Category B—Reproduction studies have been performed in rats, mice and rabbits using erythromycin and its various salts and esters, at doses which were several times multiples of the usual human dose. No evidence of impaired fertility or harm to the fetus that appeared related to erythromycin was reported in these studies. There are, however, no adequate and well-controlled studies in pregnant women. Because animal reproduction studies are not always predictive of human response, this drug should be used during pregnancy only if clearly needed.

Labor and Delivery—The effect of ERYC on labor and delivery is unknown.

Nursing Mothers—Erythromycin is excreted in milk (see CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY, in full prescribing information).

Pediatric Use—See INDICATIONS AND USAGE and DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION.

ADVERSE REACTIONS: The most frequent side effects of oral erythromycin preparations are gastrointestinal and are dose-related. They include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea and anorexia. Symptoms of hepatic dysfunction and/or abnormal liver function test results may occur (see WARNING).

Mild allergic reactions such as rashes with or without pruritus, urticaria, bullous fixed eruptions, and eczema have been reported with erythromycin. Serious allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis have been reported.

There have been isolated reports of reversible hearing loss occurring chiefly in patients with renal insufficiency and in patients receiving high doses of erythromycin.

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References: 1. Whitley R, Barton N, Collins E, et al: Mucocutaneous herpes simplex virus infections in immunocompromised patients: A model for evaluation of topical antiviral agents. Proceedings of a symposium on acyclovir sponsored by Burroughs Wellcome Co. and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. *Am J Med* 1982;73(1A):236-240. 2. Nahmias AJ, Roizman B: Infection with herpes-simplex viruses 1 and 2 (third of three parts). *N Engl J Med* 1973;289:781-789. 3. Whitley RJ, Levin M, Barton N, et al: Infections caused by herpes simplex virus in the immunocompromised host: Natural history and topical acyclovir therapy. *J Infect Dis* 1984;150:323-329.

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WARNINGS: Zovirax Ointment 5% is intended for cutaneous use only and should not be used in the eye.

PRECAUTIONS:

General: The recommended dosage, frequency of applications, and length of treatment should not be exceeded (see DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION). There exist no data which demonstrate that the use of Zovirax Ointment 5% will either prevent transmission of infection to other persons or prevent recurrent infections when applied in the absence of signs and symptoms. Zovirax Ointment 5% should not be used for the prevention of recurrent HSV infections. Although clinically significant viral resistance associated with the use of Zovirax Ointment 5% has not been observed, this possibility exists.

Drug Interactions: Clinical experience has identified no interactions resulting from topical or systemic administration of other drugs concomitantly with Zovirax Ointment 5%.

Carcinogenesis, Mutagenesis, Impairment of Fertility: Acyclovir was tested in lifetime bioassays in rats and mice at single daily doses of 50, 150 and 450 mg/kg/day given by gavage. These studies showed no statistically significant difference in the incidence of benign and malignant tumors produced in drug-treated as compared to control animals, nor did acyclovir induce the occurrence of tumors earlier in drug-treated animals as compared to controls. In 2 *in vitro* cell transformation assays, used to provide preliminary assessment of potential oncogenicity in advance of these more definitive lifetime bioassays in rodents, conflicting results were obtained. Acyclovir was positive at the highest dose used in one system and the resulting morphologically transformed cells formed tumors when inoculated into immunosuppressed, syngeneic, weanling mice. Acyclovir was negative in another transformation system.

No chromosome damage was observed at maximum tolerated parental doses of 100 mg/kg acyclovir in rats or Chinese hamsters; higher doses of 500 and 1000 mg/kg were clastogenic in Chinese hamsters. In addition, no activity was found in a dominant lethal study in mice. In 9 of 11 microbial and mammalian cell assays, no evidence of mutagenicity was observed. In 2 mammalian cell assays (human lymphocytes and L5178Y mouse lymphoma cells *in vitro*), positive response for mutagenicity and chromosomal damage occurred, but only at concentrations at least 1000 times the plasma levels achieved in man following topical application.

Acyclovir does not impair fertility or reproduction in mice at oral doses up to 450 mg/kg/day or in rats at subcutaneous doses up to 25 mg/kg/day. In rabbits given a high dose of acyclovir (50 mg/kg/day, s.c.), there was a statistically significant decrease in implantation efficiency.

Pregnancy: Teratogenic Effects. Pregnancy Category C. Acyclovir has been known to cause a statistically significant decrease in implantation efficiency in rabbits, when given at subcutaneous doses providing mean plasma levels of drug 2.2 times those expected from use in patients with normal renal function.

Reproduction studies were negative for impairment of fertility or harm to the fetus in mice given oral doses, and in rats given subcutaneous doses providing mean plasma levels of drug 84 times and 4 times (respectively) greater than those expected from use in patients with normal renal function.

Acyclovir was not teratogenic after subcutaneous administration of up to 50 mg/kg/day during the period of organogenesis in rats and rabbits; doses up to 450 mg/kg given daily by gavage to mice were not teratogenic. There are, however, no adequate and well-controlled studies in pregnant women. Acyclovir should be used during pregnancy only if the potential benefit justifies the potential risk to the fetus.

Nursing Mothers: It is not known whether this drug is excreted in human milk. Because many drugs are excreted in human milk, caution should be exercised when Zovirax is administered to a nursing woman.

ADVERSE REACTIONS: Because ulcerated genital lesions are characteristically tender and sensitive to any contact or manipulation, patients may experience discomfort upon application of ointment. In the controlled clinical trials, mild pain (including transient burning and stinging) was reported by 103 (28.3%) of 364 patients treated with acyclovir and by 115 (31.1%) of 370 patients treated with placebo; treatment was discontinued in 2 of these patients. Other local reactions among acyclovir-treated patients included pruritus in 15 (4.1%), rash in 1 (0.3%) and vulvitis in 1 (0.3%). Among the placebo-treated patients, pruritus was reported by 17 (4.6%) and rash by 1 (0.3%).

In all studies, there was no significant difference between the drug and placebo group in the rate or type of reported adverse reactions nor were there any differences in abnormal clinical laboratory findings.

DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION: Apply sufficient quantity to adequately cover all lesions every 3 hours 6 times per day for 7 days. The dose size per application will vary depending upon the total lesion area but should approximate a one-half inch ribbon of ointment per 4 square inches of surface area. A finger cot or rubber glove should be used when applying Zovirax to prevent autoinoculation of other body sites and transmission of infection to other persons. Therapy should be initiated as early as possible following onset of signs and symptoms.

HOW SUPPLIED: Zovirax Ointment 5% is supplied in 15 g tubes (NDC 0081-0993-94) and 3 g tubes (NDC 0081-0993-41). Each gram contains 50 mg acyclovir in a polyethylene glycol base. Store at 15°-25°C (59°-77°F) in a dry place.

REFERENCE: 1. Naib ZM et al. *Cancer Res* 33:1452-1463, 1973. U.S. Patent No. 4199574

Burroughs Wellcome Co. Research Triangle Park North Carolina 27709



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH
ANTIVIRAL RESEARCH



BURROUGHSWELLCOME CO.

continued from page 17

BACTROBAN®

(mupirocin)

Ointment 2%

For Dermatologic Use

DESCRIPTION

Each gram of BACTROBAN® Ointment 2% contains 20 mg mupirocin in a bland water miscible ointment base consisting of polyethylene glycol 400 and polyethylene glycol 3350 (polyethylene glycol ointment, N.F.). Mupirocin is a naturally-occurring antibiotic. The chemical name is 9-(4-[5S-(2S,3S-epoxy-5S-hydroxy-4S-methylhexyl)-3R,4R-dihydroxytetrahydropryan-2S-yl]-3-methylbut-2(E)-enoxyloxy-nonanoic acid.

CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY

Mupirocin is produced by fermentation of the organism *Pseudomonas fluorescens*. Mupirocin inhibits bacterial protein synthesis by reversibly and specifically binding to bacterial isoleucyl transfer-RNA synthetase. Due to this mode of action, mupirocin shows no cross resistance with chloramphenicol, erythromycin, fusidic acid, gentamicin, lincomycin, methicillin, neomycin, novobiocin, penicillin, streptomycin, and tetracycline.

Application of ¹⁴C-labeled mupirocin ointment to the lower arm of normal male subjects followed by occlusion for 24 hours showed no measurable systemic absorption (<1.1 nanogram mupirocin per milliliter of whole blood). Measurable radioactivity was present in the stratum corneum of these subjects 72 hours after application.

Microbiology: The following bacteria are susceptible to the action of mupirocin *in vitro*: the aerobic isolates of *Staphylococcus aureus* (including methicillin-resistant and β -lactamase producing strains), *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, *Staphylococcus saprophyticus*, and *Streptococcus pyogenes*.

Only the organisms listed in the **INDICATIONS AND USAGE** section have been shown to be clinically susceptible to mupirocin.

INDICATIONS AND USAGE

BACTROBAN® (mupirocin) Ointment is indicated for the topical treatment of impetigo due to: *Staphylococcus aureus*, beta hemolytic *Streptococcus*, and *Streptococcus pyogenes*.

*Efficacy for this organism in this organ system was studied in fewer than ten infections.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

This drug is contraindicated in individuals with a history of sensitivity reactions to any of its components.

WARNINGS

BACTROBAN® Ointment is not for ophthalmic use.

PRECAUTIONS

If a reaction suggesting sensitivity or chemical irritation should occur with the use of BACTROBAN® Ointment, treatment should be discontinued and appropriate alternative therapy for the infection instituted.

As with other antibacterial products prolonged use may result in overgrowth of nonsusceptible organisms, including fungi.

Pregnancy category B: Reproduction studies have been performed in rats and rabbits at systemic doses, i.e., orally, subcutaneously, and intramuscularly, up to 100 times the human topical dose and have revealed no evidence of impaired fertility or harm to the fetus due to mupirocin. There are, however, no adequate and well-controlled studies in pregnant women. Because animal studies are not always predictive of human response, this drug should be used during pregnancy only if clearly needed.

Nursing mothers: It is not known whether BACTROBAN® is present in breast milk. Nursing should be temporarily discontinued while using BACTROBAN®.

ADVERSE REACTIONS

The following local adverse reactions have been reported in connection with the use of BACTROBAN® Ointment: burning, stinging, or pain in 1.5% of patients; itching in 1% of patients; rash, nausea, erythema, dry skin, tenderness, swelling, contact dermatitis, and increased exudate in less than 1% of patients.

DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION

A small amount of BACTROBAN® Ointment should be applied to the affected area three times daily. The area treated may be covered with a gauze dressing if desired. Patients not showing a clinical response within 3 to 5 days should be re-evaluated.

HOW SUPPLIED

BACTROBAN® (mupirocin) Ointment 2% is supplied in 15 gram tubes. (NDC #0029-1525-22)

Store between 15° and 30°C (59° and 86°F).

0938020/B88-BS

Beecham
laboratories

BRISTOL, TENNESSEE 37620

References:

1. Data on file, Beecham Laboratories.
2. Parenti MA, Hatfield SM, Leyden JJ: Mupirocin: A topical antibiotic with a unique structure and mechanism of action. *Clinical Pharmacy* 1987;6:761-770.

highlight the dilemma faced by family medicine educators. A considerable amount of training occurs, not in the community settings where most practitioners will ultimately practice, but in the rather unique obstetrical units of perinatal referral centers. It is not surprising that residents who emerge from these referral institutions are well steeped in the theory and practice of "maximum" obstetrics¹ but have little confidence in their ability to manage patients in less technologically endowed settings.

Obstetricians confront problems that are qualitatively similar to those faced by family physicians. By spending 50 percent of their time in obstetrics, however, they are able to master and retain a wider spectrum of technical skills than their family physician colleagues and also amortize their malpractice premiums over a much broader base.² The development of a rational science of low-risk obstetrics—with attention to the biopsychosocial elements that are probably as important to optimal outcomes as many of the technical interventions that we take for granted—is likely only to flourish in settings where the preponderance of patients have low rates of complications.³ All obstetrical practitioners—family physicians, obstetricians, and midwives—will benefit from the knowledge generated by research in these real-life laboratories.

The comments of Meenan are echoed by reports from around the world that exemplify the superb results that have been achieved by midwives and general practitioners working in low-intensity settings.⁴ The example of Weyrauch and Berman from Group Health of Spokane demonstrates that it is possible to design a system that meshes the particular skills and perspectives of different kinds of obstetrical practitioners into a very effective system of care. Models such as these demonstrate the benefits to patients and providers of building collaborative models of obstetrical practice. Such collaborative models acknowledge that each discipline can play a unique and complementary role in assuring that all women have

access to the full range of appropriate perinatal care. Our current task is to define that role for family physicians.

Roger A. Rosenblatt
University of Washington
School of Medicine
Seattle

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2. Rosenblatt RA, Detering B: Changing patterns of obstetric practice in Washington State: The impact of tort reform. *Fam Med* in press
3. Smilkstein G, Helsper-Lucas A, Ashworth C, et al: Prediction of pregnancy complication: An application of the biopsychosocial model. *Soc Sci Med* 1984; 18:315-321
4. World Health Organization: Having a Baby in Europe: Report on a Study. Geneva, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 1985

MATERNAL SERUM α -FETOPROTEIN SCREENING

To the Editor:

Dr. Campbell¹ has written a comprehensive review of the current information available regarding serum α -fetoprotein screening for all prenatal patients. We disagree, however, with the conclusions reached.

Frame and Carlson² have proposed the following criteria for good screening tests that are now routinely used:

1. The disease must have a significant effect on the quality and quantity of life.
2. Acceptable methods of treatment must be available.
3. The disease must have an asymptomatic period during which detection and treatment can significantly reduce morbidity or mortality.
4. Treatment in the asymptomatic phase must yield a therapeutic result superior to that obtained by delaying treatment until symptoms appear.
5. Tests must be available at a reasonable cost to detect the condition in the asymptomatic period.
6. The cost of screening must be justified by the incidence of the condition.

continued on page 22

Nalfon[®] fenoprofen calcium

Brief Summary.

Consult the package literature for prescribing information.

Indications and Usage: Nalfon[®] (fenoprofen calcium, Dista) is indicated for relief of signs and symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis during acute flares and in long-term management.

Nalfon 200 is indicated for relief of mild to moderate pain.

Control trials are currently in progress to establish the safety and efficacy of Nalfon in children.

Contraindications: Patients who have shown hypersensitivity to Nalfon, those with a history of significantly impaired renal function, or those in whom aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs induce the symptoms of asthma, rhinitis, or urticaria.

Warnings: Use cautiously in patients with upper gastrointestinal tract disease (see Adverse Reactions). Gastrointestinal bleeding, sometimes severe (with fatalities having been reported), may occur as with other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

Patients with an active peptic ulcer should be on vigorous antilulcer treatment and be closely supervised for signs of ulcer perforation or severe gastrointestinal bleeding.

Genitourinary tract problems most frequently reported in patients taking Nalfon have been dysuria, cystitis, hematuria, interstitial nephritis, and the nephrotic syndrome. This syndrome may be preceded by fever, rash, arthralgia, oliguria, and azotemia and may progress to anuria. There may also be substantial proteinuria, and, on renal biopsy, electron microscopy has shown focal glomerular and T-lymphocyte infiltration in the renal interstitium. Early recognition of the syndrome and withdrawal of the drug have been followed by rapid recovery. Administration of steroids and the use of dialysis have also been included in the treatment. Because this syndrome with some of these characteristics has also been reported with other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, it is recommended that patients who have had these reactions with other such drugs not be treated with Nalfon. In patients with possibly compromised renal function, periodic renal function examinations should be done.

Precautions: Since Nalfon is eliminated primarily by the kidneys, patients with possibly compromised renal function (such as the elderly) should be closely monitored; a lower daily dosage should be anticipated to avoid excessive drug accumulation. Dosage should be discontinued if any significant liver abnormalities occur.

As with other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, borderline elevations of one or more liver tests may occur in up to 15% of patients. These abnormalities may progress, may remain essentially unchanged, or may be transient with continued therapy. The SGPT (ALT) test is probably the most sensitive indicator of liver dysfunction. Meaningful (three times the upper limit of normal) elevations of SGPT or SGOT (AST) in controlled clinical trials in less than 1% of patients. A patient with symptoms and/or signs suggesting liver dysfunction, or in whom an abnormal liver test has occurred, should be evaluated for evidence of the development of more severe hepatic reaction while on therapy with Nalfon. Severe hepatic reactions, including jaundice and cases of fatal hepatitis, have been reported with Nalfon as with other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Although such reactions are rare, if abnormal liver tests persist or worsen, if clinical signs and symptoms consistent with liver disease develop, or if systemic manifestations occur (eg, eosinophilia, rash, etc), Nalfon should be discontinued.

Administration to pregnant patients and nursing mothers is not recommended.

In patients receiving Nalfon and a steroid concomitantly, any reduction in steroid dosage should be gradual to avoid the possible complications of sudden steroid withdrawal.

Patients with initial low hemoglobin values who are receiving long-term therapy should have a hemoglobin determination at reasonable intervals.

Peripheral edema has been observed in some patients. Use with caution in patients with compromised cardiac function or hypertension. The possibility of renal involvement should be considered.

Eye examinations are recommended if visual disturbances occur.

Patients with impaired hearing should have periodic tests of auditory function during chronic therapy.

Nalfon decreases platelet aggregation and may prolong bleeding time.

Laboratory Test Interactions—Amerlex-M kit assay values of total and free triiodothyronine in patients receiving Nalfon have been reported as falsely elevated on the basis of a chemical cross-reaction that directly interferes with the assay. Thyroid-stimulating hormone, total thyroxine, and thyrotropin-releasing hormone response are not affected.

Adverse Reactions: The adverse reactions reported below were compiled during clinical trials of 3,391 arthritic patients, including 188 observed for at least 52 weeks of continuous therapy. During short-term studies for analgesia, the incidence of adverse reactions was markedly lower than in longer-term studies.

Incidence Greater Than 1%

Probable Causal Relationship—Digestive System: The most common adverse reactions were gastrointestinal and involved 14% of patients; in descending order of frequency, they included dyspepsia,* constipation,* nausea,* vomiting,* abdominal pain, anorexia, occult blood in the stool, diarrhea, flatulence, dry mouth. **Nervous System:** headache* and somnolence* occurred in 15% of patients; dizziness,* tremor, confusion, and insomnia were noted less frequently. **Skin and Appendages:** pruritus,* rash, increased sweating, urticaria. **Special Senses:** tinnitus, blurred vision, decreased hearing. **Cardiovascular:** palpitations,* tachycardia. **Miscellaneous:** nervousness,* asthenia,* dyspnea, fatigue, malaise.

Incidence Less Than 1%

Probable Causal Relationship—Digestive System: gastritis, peptic ulcer with or without perforation, and/or gastroenteritis, hemorragia. **Genitourinary Tract:** dysuria, hematuria, cystitis, oliguria, azotemia, anuria, interstitial nephritis, nephrosis, papillary necrosis. **Hematologic:** purpura, bruising, hemorrhage, thrombocytopenia, hemolytic anemia, aplastic anemia, agranulocytosis, pancytopenia. **Miscellaneous:** peripheral edema, anaphylaxis.

Incidence Less Than 1%

Causal Relationship Unknown—Skin and Appendages: Stevens-Johnson syndrome, angioneurotic edema, exfoliative dermatitis, alopecia. **Digestive System:** aphthous ulcerations of buccal mucosa, metallic taste, pancreatitis. **Cardiovascular:** atrial fibrillation, pulmonary edema, electrocardiographic changes, supraventricular tachycardia. **Nervous System:** depression, disorientation, seizures, trigeminal neuralgia. **Special Senses:** burning tongue, diplopia, optic neuritis. **Miscellaneous:** personality change, lymphadenopathy, mastodynia, fever.

Dosage and Administration: Rheumatoid Arthritis and Osteoarthritis—suggested dosage: 300 to 600 mg t.i.d. or q.i.d.

Relief of Moderate Pain—Nalfon 100 q. 4-5 h., as needed.

Do not exceed 3,200 mg per day.

*Incidence 3% to 9%.

[020687]

PV 1026

Additional information available to the profession on request

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

continued from page 20

The serum α -fetoprotein screening test falls short on several of these criteria: Only the first is clearly met when screening for neural tube defects with maternal serum α -fetoprotein (MSAFP). Each of the subsequent criteria fail or are controversial. Most notably, the abnormalities detected by the MSAFP screening test are not treatable. The only "treatment" available for anencephaly is abortion, although lack of treatment results in the same final outcome—death—for the fetus. The treatment for spina bifida is surgical and rehabilitative, although here again abortion can be used to avoid the need for such therapies. Patients have a legal option to pursue abortion. To suggest a medical interpretation of abortion as a "treatment" for disorders, as opposed to a service provided for those who would opt not to "treat" the anomaly, however, is taking a stance regarding quality and sanctity of life issues that society and the medical community have not agreed to take.

Analyses of the cost-benefit ratio of prenatal screening for MSAFP assume that a patient whose fetus has spina bifida will choose to abort.³ Data regarding these children suggest the abnormality, the necessary surgery and rehabilitation, and the resultant disability vary greatly.⁴ In contrast to Down's syndrome, mental function of most of the children is unaffected.⁴ Primary care physicians with experience counseling women at increased risk for Down's syndrome are well aware that many women are unwilling to consider abortion for their unborn child regardless of the child's "normality." While accurate data are lacking regarding women with known spina bifida fetuses in utero, one would expect a diversity of opinions and desires in these women.

The benefits of screening, as presented in this article and after careful analysis by Dr. Campbell, consisted primarily of detection of three of the four spina bifida cases. Detection of the anencephalic cases, as well as the twins and inaccurate gestational age pregnancies, could occur with routine use of ultrasonography alone. Data are lacking regarding the sensitivity

and the benefits of detecting Down's syndrome and high-risk pregnancies by this method. The risks of screening include one miscarriage secondary to amniocentesis, one orthopedic deformity or case of respiratory distress in the fetus secondary to the removal of amniotic fluid, and approximately 500 pairs of prospective parents experiencing moderately severe anxiety during the screening procedures. The author concludes the benefits are relatively small but appear to be significantly greater than the risks. Does the awareness of the three parents that they have a child with spina bifida clearly outweigh the damage to two potentially normal fetuses, as well as the moderately severe anxiety of 500 families, even if abortion is chosen by all three? And if any of the three choose not to abort (irrespective of what they thought they would do at the beginning of the screening), the benefit-risk ratio falls precipitously.

The presence of neural tube defects is only one of many risks the pregnant patient has for an adverse outcome. Other screening tests are available, have had positive cost-benefit analyses, have lower costs per case detected, and lead to treatments that may lower morbidity or mortality for the fetus and for the woman. Examples include screening for gestational diabetes, testing for Chlamydia trachomatis in early pregnancy, the routine use of ultrasound for detection of twins or inappropriate growth, and so on. Funds for health care in general, and prenatal care specifically, are limited. Each time money is spent on one procedure or test, that money becomes unavailable for other methods of assuring that patients obtain the most health or the most favorable outcome for the resources used. Furthermore, each time a physician spends 20 minutes of the patient visit discussing a one in 1000 possibility, then the time that should be spent counseling the patient on topics known to relate to fetal outcome (smoking cessation, nutrition, stress management, signs of premature labor) must be cut.

The recommendation by American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

 **Dista Products Company**
Division of Eli Lilly and Company
Indianapolis, Indiana 46285



The diuretic that doesn't compromise cholesterol

LOZOL® indapamide 2.5 mg tablets

BRIEF SUMMARY

DESCRIPTION: LOZOL (indapamide) is an oral antihypertensive diuretic.

INDICATIONS AND USAGE: LOZOL is indicated for the treatment of hypertension, alone or in combination with other antihypertensive drugs.

LOZOL is also indicated for the treatment of salt and fluid retention associated with congestive heart failure.

Usage in Pregnancy: (see PRECAUTIONS).

Contraindications: Aruria, hypersensitivity to indapamide or other sulfonamide-derived drugs.

WARNINGS: Hypokalemia occurs commonly with diuretics, and electrolyte monitoring is essential. In general, diuretics should not be given concomitantly with lithium.

PRECAUTIONS: GENERAL: 1. *Hypokalemia and Other Fluid and Electrolyte Imbalances:* Periodic determinations of serum electrolytes should be performed at appropriate intervals. In addition, patients should be observed for clinical signs of fluid or electrolyte imbalance, such as hyponatremia, hypochloremic alkalosis, or hypokalemia. Electrolyte determinations are particularly important in patients who are vomiting excessively or receiving parenteral fluids, in patients subject to electrolyte imbalance (including those with heart failure, kidney disease, and cirrhosis), and in patients on a salt-restricted diet. The risk of hypokalemia secondary to diuresis and natriuresis is increased when larger doses are used, when the diuresis is brisk, when severe cirrhosis is present and during concomitant use of corticosteroids or ACTH. Interference with adequate oral intake of electrolytes will also contribute to hypokalemia. Hypokalemia can sensitize or exaggerate the response of the heart to the toxic effects of digitalis, such as increased ventricular irritability. Dilutional hyponatremia may occur in edematous patients; the appropriate treatment is restriction of water rather than administration of salt, except in rare instances when the hyponatremia is life threatening. However, in actual salt depletion, appropriate replacement is the treatment of choice. Any chloride deficit that may occur during treatment is generally mild and usually does not require specific treatment except in extraordinary circumstances as in liver or renal disease. 2. *Hyperurcemia and Gout:* Serum concentrations of uric acid increased by an average of 1.0 mg/100 ml in patients treated with indapamide, and frank gout may be precipitated in certain patients receiving indapamide (see ADVERSE REACTIONS). Serum concentrations of uric acid should therefore be monitored periodically during treatment. 3. *Renal Impairment:* Renal function tests should be performed periodically during treatment with indapamide. 4. *Impaired Hepatic Function:* Indapamide, like the thiazides, should be used with caution in patients with impaired hepatic function or progressive liver disease, since minor alterations of fluid and electrolyte balance may precipitate hepatic coma. 5. *Glucose Tolerance:* Latent diabetes may become manifest and insulin requirements in diabetic patients may be altered during thiazide administration. Serum concentrations of glucose should be monitored routinely during treatment with indapamide. 6. *Calcium Excretion:* Calcium excretion is decreased by diuretics pharmacologically related to indapamide. Indapamide may decrease serum PBI levels without signs of thyroid disturbance. 7. *Interaction With Systemic Lupus Erythematosus:* Thiazides have exacerbated or activated systemic lupus erythematosus.

DRUG INTERACTIONS: 1. *Other Antihypertensives:* LOZOL (indapamide) may add to or potentiate the action of other antihypertensive drugs. 2. *Lithium:* See WARNINGS. 3. *Post-Sympathectomy Patient:* The antihypertensive effect of the drug may be enhanced in the postsympathectomized patient. 4. *Norepinephrine:* Indapamide may decrease arterial responsiveness to norepinephrine, but this diminution is not sufficient to preclude effectiveness of the pressor agent for therapeutic use. **CARCINOGENESIS, IMPAIRMENT OF FERTILITY:** Both mouse and rat life-time carcinogenicity studies were conducted. There was no significant difference in the incidence of tumors between the indapamide-treated animals and the control groups.

PREGNANCY/TERATOGENIC EFFECTS: PREGNANCY CATEGORY B. Diuretics are known to cross the placental barrier and appear in cord blood. Because animal reproduction studies are not always predictive of human response, this drug should be used during pregnancy only if clearly needed. **NURSING MOTHERS:** It is not known whether this drug is excreted in human milk. If use of this drug is deemed essential, the patient should stop nursing.

ADVERSE REACTIONS: Most adverse effects have been mild and transient. In long-term controlled clinical studies, equal to or greater than 5% cumulative adverse reactions are headache, dizziness, fatigue, weakness, loss of energy, lethargy, tiredness, or malaise, muscle cramps or spasm, or numbness of the extremities, nervousness, tension, anxiety, irritability, or agitation; and less than 5% cumulative adverse reactions are lightheadedness, drowsiness, vertigo, insomnia, depression, blurred vision, constipation, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, gastric irritation, abdominal pain or cramps, anorexia, orthostatic hypotension, premature ventricular contractions, irregular heart beat, palpitations, frequency of urination, nocturia, polyuria, rash, hives, pruritus, vasculitis, impotence or reduced libido, rhinorrhea, flushing, hyperuricemia, hyperglycemia, hyponatremia, hypochloremia, increase in serum urea nitrogen (BUN) or creatinine, glycosuria, weight loss, dry mouth, tingling of extremities. Clinical hypokalemia occurred in 3% and 7% of patients given indapamide 2.5 mg and 5.0 mg, respectively.

HOW SUPPLIED: White, round film-coated tablets of 2.5 mg in bottles of 100, 1,000, and in unit-dose blister packs, boxes of 100 (10 x 10 strips).

REFERENCES: 1. Ames RP. The effects of antihypertensive drugs on serum lipids and lipoproteins. 1. Diuretics. *Drugs* 1986;32:282-278. 2. The Lipid Research Clinics Coronary Primary Prevention Trial Results. II. The relationship of reduction in incidence of coronary heart disease to cholesterol lowering. *JAMA* 1984;251:365-374. 3. Scalabrino A, Galeone F, Giuntoli F, et al: Clinical investigation on long-term effects of indapamide in patients with essential hypertension. *Curr Ther Res* 1984;35:17-22. 4. Beling S, Vukovich RA, Neiss ES, et al: Long-term experience with indapamide. *Am Heart J* 1983;106:258-262.

See product circular for full prescribing information.

Product of Servier Research Institute.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

continued from page 22

cologists to inform all pregnant patients of maternal MSAFP screening (in communities where well-coordinated programs exist) has been taken as a specialty and legal mandate that the benefits of screening for MSAFP outweigh the potential risks and the costs—both monetary and emotional. The strength of the data at this time does not support this conclusion.

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Stephen Ratcliffe, MD, MSPH
William Sayres, MD
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The preceding letter was referred to Dr. Campbell, who responds as follows:

Drs. Reed, Ratcliffe, and Sayres raise some important and controversial issues in MSAFP screening. As mentioned in my paper, the ethical issues involved in prenatal screening are complex and beyond the scope of the review. Society and the medical community, however, currently offer abortion as an option or "treatment" for serious fetal anomalies.

There are data regarding the desires of women with known spina bifida in utero. In the three prospective studies of MSAFP screening reviewed in my paper, 50 of the 54 screened women with fetuses affected by neural tube defects chose to abort them. This 8 percent rate of women declining amniocentesis for detected neural tube defects does not substantially affect

either the benefit-risk ratio or the cost-effectiveness of screening. Women who oppose abortion on all grounds generally choose not to be screened for fetal anomalies.

The decision whether to undergo MSAFP screening must be made by each pregnant woman and her partner in consultation with her physician. Making the risks and benefits of screening explicit will assist them in this decision. The benefits appear to outweigh the risks, and thus screening should be offered to all women. Each woman must weigh these risks and benefits and make her own decision. For example, many women may take considerable risks (including risks of moderate anxiety and terminating a normal pregnancy) to prevent the delivery of a severely handicapped child. Others will not want to assume these risks.

Analyzing how MSAFP screening will influence the allocation of finite medical resources is more complex than Reed et al suggest. Even when a procedure of treatment is cost effective, the overall impact of its use is difficult to predict. For instance, while the costs of MSAFP screening are mostly medical, one third of the savings are nonmedical (costs of education and residential care of children with spina bifida).¹ This demand may result in fewer dollars for health care and more for social needs (which may affect health). The overall economic benefits of MSAFP screening equal or exceed the cost, but the differential effect on health care dollars vs other monies must be considered by health care planners, public policy makers, and society in general.

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1. Sadovnick, AD, Baird PA. A cost-benefit analysis of prenatal diagnosis for neural tube defects selectively offered to relatives of index cases. *Am J Med Genet* 1982; 12:63-73