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NEWSLETTER FROM THE UNITED STATES

From: Science Information Bureau
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Dear Colleague:

Progress, although slow, is constantly being made in determining the influence of heredity versus environment on development of disease. A further step forward in this area has been made by the use of an *electrocardiograph to detect congenital heart ailments in unborn babies*. According to S. D. Larks and L. Longo, reporting in the July 16 issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (173: 1217, 1960), improvements in electrocardiographs as well as in technique and in understanding of the problems has made it possible to take an extremely accurate electrocardiogram of a foetus as early as the 22nd week of pregnancy. There are many advantages to early detection of heart ailments. First of all, preparations for surgery of the newborn immediately after birth can be planned, possibly saving many lives. As far as research is concerned, this new technique may permit physicians to determine exactly when in the course of a pregnancy certain congenital abnormalities do occur, thus affording an answer to whether the abnormality is the result of heredity or of some infective condition contracted during pregnancy.

A review of current therapeutic agents available for management of some of the common intestinal parasitic diseases was undertaken by B. H. Kean, who reports his findings in the July issue of *Postgraduate Medicine* (28: 35, 1960). This study was conducted because of the number of recently discovered drugs available for eliminating or controlling these infections. The author estimates that about 40 million citizens of the United States are now harboring parasites. This fact combined with increased international travel, plus the influx of about one million Puerto Ricans into the United States, and the emphasis here on global medicine will probably make physicians more alert to the possibility of parasitic infections when they make their diagnoses. One of the common intestinal parasites is *Enterobius vermicularis*, also called pinworm or threadworm. Re-infection makes this parasitic disease difficult to cure and often is responsible for its protracted course. A new therapeutic agent, *pyrvinium pamoate* (*Vanquin*) is available for treatment of *enterobiasis* in conjunction with the usual adjuvant measures. Dr. Kean states that a single dose of Vanquin will cure enterobiasis in over 90 per cent of patients. The recommended dose is 5 mg. of the anhydrous pyrvinium base per kilogram of body weight; or 1 teaspoonful (5 cc.) of Vanquin suspension per 22 lbs. (10 kg.) of body weight; or one 100 mg. tablet per 40 lbs. of body weight. Because overdosage is not dangerous, dosages may be rounded off toward the larger size. Toxic symptoms rarely occur.

Incidence of gout among women is more common than was formerly believed, according to a recent study of 74 patients with gouty arthritis observed during the past four years. The study was undertaken by R. E. Turner and co-workers writing in the September issue of A.M.A. Archives of Internal Medicine (106: 400, 1960). In most studies of patients with gout, women made up less than 10 per cent of the total number of cases, but in this study, 19 of the 74 patients with gout were women. Most physicians have observed that when gout occurs in women, it usually happens after the menopause. In this study, 4 of the 19 women contracted gout before their menopause.

A faster than average hardening of the aorta is associated with increased incidence of heart attacks. This observation was based on an autopsy study of 285 men and was reported by S. L. Wilens and C. M. Plair in the August issue of the A.M.A. Archives of Pathology (70: 149, 1960). In the average man (about one out of two) arteriosclerosis progresses to approximately the same extent throughout life. In some exceptional persons (about one in eight) the arteriosclerotic process is retarded, and in about the same number of persons, the process is accelerated. The authors found that the incidence of myocardial infarction was $5\frac{1}{2}$ times as great in persons with aortic sclerosis that had progressed 15 or more years beyond the average for their age when compared with men whose aortic sclerosis was retarded 15 or more years behind the average for their age.

Some authorities have felt that twins are more likely to develop psychiatric illnesses requiring hospitalization than are non-twins. This had been attributed to a condition known as "confusion of ego identity" which was believed to occur more commonly in twins who look alike, are dressed alike, and are treated alike. However, a recent study by D. Rosenthal, based on studies in Sweden and Germany and published in the September issue of the A.M.A. Archives of General Psychiatry (3: 297, 1960), indicates that this theory is not necessarily true. The best evidence available points to the fact that *neither schizophrenia nor psychiatric illnesses requiring hospitalization occur more frequently in twins.* It is a logical conclusion, therefore, that "confusion of ego identity" does not have value as far as etiology of schizophrenia is concerned. It is possible, however, that "confusion of ego identity" is a symptom rather than a cause of mental disorder.

More news next month. Good health, good luck, and good practice.

THERAPEUTICS.