

Letters to the Editor

THALES TO GALEN

Sir, Fellows and Members must have noticed with appreciation the great improvement in the *Proceedings* under the editorship of Dr Sircus and Dr Passmore, through the encouragement and publication of articles of general medical interest particularly, perhaps, those dealing with a wide variety of historical subjects. It was with keen anticipation that I read the Editorial in the January number announcing a series of articles on ancient Greek medicine entitled *Thales to Galen* by Dr R. Sullivan. The July number has now ended the author's Brief Journey. He has provided a useful and elegantly illustrated account of the early classical foundations of our profession and the broad sweep of his survey should be commended. It is, however, sad that his text is marred by inadequate proof reading. The printers have failed to reproduce Greek letters accurately and errors in Greek words and their English transcriptions have been uncorrected.

D Emslie-Smith
48 Seafield Road, Broughty Ferry, Dundee

THE BOTTOM LINE

Sir, I have many times over the years thought about the difficulties (surprisingly little discussed, even by medical students) which surround weightless persons when performing (if you will pardon me) their daily excretory functions. Urine (at least for the male) should be less of a problem than stool, because maintaining steady bladder pressure against a non-return, non-splash valve would probably do the trick. The ladies would not be so easy to please, but I am confident that necessity could none the less make an inventor of the mother. Defaecation might (or might not) be a weightier problem—not nearly so easy to control or to direct the pressure or the flow. Would induction of profuse wind to intersperse with stool (like an autoanalyser) help? I doubt it. Would the reverse process, a vacuum container, work? I doubt it. Quite difficult. Even hand-washing afterwards with water which flows under pressure, but which will not stay put under gravity, must require very special skills.

Short of writing to NASA to obtain the true-life solution(s), I thought that I had exhausted the issue until I saw the July *Proceedings*. I suspect that David Boyd's photograph on page 499 has little real connection with Dr Sullivan's journey through medical philosophy, but that it simply serves to illustrate a seat of learning, or perhaps it is merely a tail-piece. But, as often happens, the sting lies in the tail, and this brings me back to earth, and to my previous flights of thought.

The neat drainage gutter around the circular hole, and the break in the circle at the front, provide clear circumstantial evidence that the buttocks were intended to be applied to the left hand side of the vertical slab in the picture. The head

presumably rested on pillows further to the left, and the feet on the slabs at the upper right. Now, given weightlessness, only those problems boringly struggled over would, as it were, surface. But ponder (if you permit me) the gravity of the real world situation. Expulsion of waste matter from the body orifices in this position under the effects of gravity would be at best messy, and at worst seepage headward of undrained effluent would surely result in the recumbent stinking all the way 'from arse-hole to breakfast time' as Harold Pinter put it (or at least to the occiput).

There are however clues which shed light on the problem, not least the sun's rays from below the horizon, which reinforce my own (untested) memory of Sabratha (*not* Tabratha), and provide a more satisfactory solution than may ever be available in space. The photograph needs only to be rotated clockwise through 90° to achieve perfect equipoise (humanpoise is no improvement etymologically), and a full explanation of how the fundamental design of modern western sanitary seating has been able to remain unchanged (save for the introduction of new-fangled singularity) for at least two millenia.

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EDITOR'S REPLY

We thank Dr Davidson for pointing out our errors in such an entertaining way. Cock-ups occur occasionally in the best organisations. We cannot understand how we in our office and also our usually observant printers were blind to this one. The second error arose because we misread the handwritten caption of the picture that Dr David Boyd sent us. Dr Boyd did not have an opportunity to see a proof and so is in no way responsible for these errors.

ACUTE RENAL FAILURE

Sir, Given the high prevalence of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug(NSAID)-related nephrotoxicity cited by Cumming (*Proc R Coll Physicians Edinb* 1966; 26: 393-401) in the symposium on Renal Medicine, it almost amounts to a public health scandal that the publicity given to this aspect of NSAID-related morbidity lags so far behind that accorded to NSAID-related gastroenteropathy in the British medical press. In our major non-specialist medical journals, during the past 6 years (i.e. since 1990), there have been only two publications solely on NSAID-related nephrotoxicity,^{1,2} as opposed to five dealing solely with NSAID-related gastroenteropathy,^{3,4,5,6,7} hence, perhaps, the 58% prevalence of awareness of renal implications of NSAID usage amongst general practitioners in the Tayside and Fife regions.⁸ Assuming a much lower public awareness of NSAID-related nephrotoxicity, the increasing use of non-prescription medication necessitates an urgent campaign of public education to highlight the fact that even ibuprofen could prove nephrotoxic to as many as 18% of patients aged >65.⁹

OMP Jolobe
Tameside General Hospital, Ashton-under-Lyne

REFERENCES

- ¹McDonald GA, Du Bose TD, Molony DA *et al.* Nephrotoxicity of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. *Lancet* 1994; **344**: 515-8.
- ²Evans JMM, McGregor E, McMahon AD *et al.* Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and hospitalisation for acute renal failure. *Q J Med* 1995; **88**: 551-7.
- ³Alexander-Williams J. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and peptic ulcers. *Br Med J* 1990; **300**: 278-9.
- ⁴Morris AJ, Madhok R, Sturrock *et al.* Enteroscopic diagnosis of small bowel ulceration in patients receiving non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. *Lancet* 1991; **337**: 520.
- ⁵Rodriguez LA and Jick H. Risk of upper gastrointestinal bleeding and perforation associated with individual non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. *Lancet* 1994; **343**: 769-72.
- ⁶Weil J, Colin-Jones D, Langman M *et al.* Prophylactic aspirin and risk of peptic ulcer bleeding. *Br Med J* 1995; **310**: 827-30.
- ⁷Henry D, Lim LL-Y, Rodriguez LAG *et al.* Variability of risk of gastrointestinal complications with individual non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs: results of a collaborative meta-analysis. *Br Med J* 1996; **312**: 1563-6.
- ⁸Keys J, Beardon PHG, Lau C *et al.* General practitioners' use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in Tayside and Fife regions. *J R Soc Med* 1992; **85**: 442-5.
- ⁹Murry MD, Brater DC, Tierney WM *et al.* Ibuprofen-associated renal impairment in a large general internal medicine practice. *Am J Med Sci* 1990; **299**: 222-9.

College Notices

The Library

SOME RECENT ADDITIONS

- ARNOLD, D *ed*: Warm climates and western medicine. Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1996.
- BARNISH, G: Some medicinal plant recipes of the Mende, Sierra Leone. Medical Research Council Laboratory, Sierra Leone, 1992. (Presented by Fiona Pirie, Library, RCPE).
- BEERS, CW: A mind that found itself. Longmans, Green & Co, 1908. Classics of Medicine Library, 1996. (Presented by Dr Myre Sim).
- BRINE, J: Looking for Milligan: the fascinating search for William Milligan, a pioneering doctor of the Swan River Colony, c. 1795-1851. The Milligan Society, 1991. (Presented by Dr J Brine)
- CAMERON, A *ed*: A surgeon's India: diaries of Lt Col Alexander Cameron, OBE, Indian Medical Service. Cassell & Co Ltd, 1985. (Presented by Dr R Passmore).
- DINGWALL, HM: Late 17th century Edinburgh: a demographic study. Scholar Press, Aldershot, 1994.
- GRANGE, JM: Mycobacteria and human disease. 2nd ed Edward Arnold, 1996.
- HAMILTON, WD: Narrow roads of gene land. Vol 1, Evolution of social behaviour. Freeman/Spektrum, Oxford, 1996.
- HARBORNE, JB & BAXTER, H: Dictionary of plant toxins. Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1996.
- HEAGNEY, B. The long days of slavery: Fellows and Members of the RACP who were prisoners-of-war in South East Asia. Sydney, RACP, 1996. (Presented by B Heagney).
- LLOYD, M & BOR, R: Communication skills for medicine. Churchill Livingstone, 1996.
- LOCK, S & WELLS, F: Fraud and misconduct in medical research. 2nd ed. BMJ, 1996.
- MCCONACHIE, J: The student soldiers. Moravian Press, Elgin, 1995.
- MADANAGOPALAN, N: Selected writings of Prof N Madanagopalan. (Presented by Prof N Madanagopalan).
- MANUEL, DE: Marshall Hall 1790-1857. Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1996.
- MARKS, L: Metropolitan maternity. Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1996.
- ONG, BN: Rapid appraisal and health policy. Chapman & Hall, 1996.
- PARKES, WR: Occupational lung disorders. 3rd ed. Butterworth Heinemann, 1996. (Presented by Dr W Raymond Parkes).
- PORTER, R. Cambridge illustrated history of medicine. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- PORTER, R & TEICH, M *eds*: Drugs and narcotics in history. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- SCOTTISH HISTORY SOCIETY: Miscellany XII. The Scottish History Society, 1994.
- SCOTTISH HISTORY SOCIETY: The British Linen Company 1745-1775. The Scottish History Society, 1996.
- SMYTH, JF *et al eds*: rhErythropoietin in cancer supportive treatment. New York, Dekker, 1996. (Presented by Dr JF Smyth).
- SURRUN, SK: Handbook of the cardiac patient. University of Mauritius, 1995. (Presented by Dr SK Surrun).
- TAGLIACOZZI: De curtorum chirurgia per insitionem. Venice, 1597. transl. by JH Thomas, Classics of Medicine Library, 1996. (Presented by Dr Myre Sim).
- TUDGE, C: The day before yesterday: five million years of human history. Jonathan Cape, 1995.
- TURNER, W: A New Herball Parts I, II & III (1551, 1562 & 1568). Edited by G Chapman & M Tweddle, Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- WATSON, ML & TORRES, VE: Polycystic kidney disease. OUP, 1996. (Presented by Dr Watson).

Symposia

ADVANCES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMON NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS

A symposium was held on 18th September 1996 in the Queen Mother Conference Centre, Edinburgh.

The speakers were:

Dr R. Roberts	What's new in epilepsy?
Dr D. Bates	Multiple sclerosis: is an effective treatment imminent?
Dr P. Goadsby	New concepts in the understanding and management of headache.
Dr D. Stevens	Who should manage neurological disorders?
Dr S. Wessely	Yes, you can treat chronic fatigue syndrome.
Dr I. G. McKeith	Dementia: towards practical therapies.
Dr N. Quinn	Parkinson's disease: what has surgery to offer?
Dr M. Dennis	Management of transient ischaemic attacks.

College Directory 1995/96

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To obtain a copy please complete the application form below and send it, with a cheque made out to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, to College Records Officer, Royal College of Physicians, 9 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH12 1JQ.

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- The water-colour of the **College entrance at No. 9 Queen Street, by John Piper** painted in 1951, was purchased from the *R. F. Robertson Memorial Fund*. The cost of the Print **unframed** is £10.00 and **framed** £60.00. Postage in the UK 1st Class/Registered unframed: £4.00 and Overseas Air Mail/Registered unframed: £4.50. It is not possible at all to post a framed print either in the UK or Overseas as they are too fragile once framed. However there is a small supply of framed prints available for purchase at the College but it is advisable to check availability before visiting.
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- Edinburgh Crystal Whisky Decanter** engraved with the College Coat of Arms at a cost of £68.00. Postage in the UK 1st Class/Registered is £10.00. The cost of postage for Registered/Surface Mail for Overseas will vary according to the destination, costs are available on request.
- Fine Bone China Presentation Plate** with the College Coat of Arms painted on it in Green and Gold-Leaf at a cost of £40.00. Postage in the UK 1st Class/Registered is £6.00 and Overseas Registered/Surface Mail is £8.00.
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Mrs R. O'Flynn
 Royal College of Physicians
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REFEREEING AND PUBLICATION

Any article may be submitted to peer review and for evaluation once accepted. Manuscripts are published in the earliest possible issue according to available space.

TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Each table with a brief title should be typed on a separate page. Illustrations (line drawings, radiographs, photomicrographs, etc.) should be glossy prints and not be mounted. Each illustration should have a label on the reverse side giving its number (to correspond with its reference in the text) and the name(s) of the author(s); the top of the illustration should be indicated.

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REFERENCES

Those, numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals without parentheses, should be listed on a separate page. They should be set out as in the examples below and include both the first and the last page numbers.

1. Somerville J, Jefferson K. Left ventricular angiocardiology in atrioventricular defects. *Br Heart J* 1968; 30: 446-57.
2. Sherlock S. Alcohol and the liver. In: Sherlock S. Diseases of the liver and biliary system. Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications 1983, 334-45.

If there are more than four authors, the name of the first three only are given and *et al* added.

UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

All measurements should be expressed in SI (Système International) units.

PAGE PROOFS

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