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LUCINA

Lucina suspects that few British paediatricians would offer, and equally few parents would give, a 20 day course of antibiotics for acute otitis media. In case you were thinking of it, however, a trial in Pennsylvania (*Pediatrics* 1995; **96**: 5–13) showed that treatment for 20 days was no better than for 10 days.

Severely constipated American children were given conventional treatment and also taught to relax their anal sphincters at defaecation using electromyography biofeedback (Pediatrics 1995; 96: 105–10). They did no better in the long term than children given only conventional treatment.

Doctors in Taiwan have found that rubbing the injection site for one minute after diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccination leads to higher antibody titres and more adverse reactions (*Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal* 1995; **14**: 567–72). As the adverse reactions were mild however, they continue to rub.

Autosomal dominant prolonged QT (LQT) syndromes (Romano-Ward syndrome), have been localised to three different chromosomal sites: LQT1 to 11p, LQT2 to 7q, and LQT3 to 3p. Two gene mutations have been identified: for LQT2, the HERG gene which affects potassium channels, and for LQT3, the SCN5A gene which controls sodium channel activity. Now it has been shown that SCN5A mutant channels have a sustained inward sodium current during depolarisation and fluctuate between normal and non-activating modes. As a result there is delayed repolarisation of the cardiac action potential which is seen on electrocardiography as a prolonged QT interval (Nature 1995; 376: 640–1 and 683–5). Such work gives hope of a more fundamental understanding of the cardiac impulse and more common arrhythmias.

Experiments on infant rhesus monkeys have shown that wearing spectacle lenses affects eye growth in the young. Positive lenses inhibit eye growth and negative ones encourage it. The use of negative lenses for children with myopia might, therefore, make the myopia worse. One way to get round the problem might be to fit 'progressive', multifocal lenses to keep the retinal image sharp at all distances of vision. (*Nature Medicine* 1995; **1**: 737–9 and 761–5).

Tuberculoma of the brain seems to be particularly common in South India. Doctors in Madras treated 108 patients (including 49 children under 15 years) with two different nine month regimens each including rifampicin, isoniazid, and pyrazinamide for three months followed by six months of rifampicin and

isoniazid (Tubercle and Lung Disease 1995; 76: 311–7). Both groups did well; 90% of patients were clinically normal at the end of treatment and after two years 78% of computed tomograms were normal.

Lucina was pleased to read that girls with congenital adrenal hyperplasia appear to have a normal quality of life as adults (*European Journal of Pediatrics* 1995; **154**: 708–16). This was the main finding of a survey of 45 patients in Germany. They did, however, marry and have children less frequently than controls and had more psychosexual problems but were not more likely to be homosexual.

Surgeons at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto have compared their results for 23 open cholecystectomies done before April 1992 and 29 laparoscopic cholecystectomies done since then (Journal of Pediatric Surgery 1995; 30: 971–3). They found that postoperative analgesia requirement was significantly less after laparoscopic operation and postoperative hospital stay was reduced to about a third of what it had been. This meant that the laparoscopic operation was much cheaper.

About 40% of children and young adults with sickle cell disease presenting to hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio with chest pain had bone infarction of the chest wall or thoracic spine (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1995; **333**: 699–703). Encouraging these patients to take 10 deep breaths every two hours led to a significant reduction in pulmonary atelectasis or infiltration.

When choroid plexus cysts but no other anomalies are detected on fetal ultrasound scanning the risk of chromosomal abnormality is one in 150 but when there are accompanying abnormalities the risk is one in three (Lancet 1995; 346: 724–9). The chromosomal abnormalities most commonly found are trisomy 18 (76%) and trisomy 21 (17%). The risk of trisomy 21 for a fetus with isolated choroid plexus cysts is one in 880.

It has been estimated that some 15 to 40 thousand children in Britain play a substantial part in caring for a sick or disabled adult (National Children's Bureau, *Highlight*, number 137, 1995). These children may suffer from an inappropriate burden which leaves little time for play or education and may lead to social isolation. Some local authorities have accepted that they are 'children in need' under the 1989 Children Act. New legislation due to be implemented during 1996 should oblige local authorities to assess the needs of carers, including children.