

The word "Ecology" first appeared in the English language in 1873. Today less than a century later the impact of our race upon the environment has so increased in force that the world has changed in essence.

Today we have been looking at one aspect of our house-keeping, the effect of the house dust which previous generations have tried to sweep into the corners and under the carpet. With the population explosion, the carcinoma of planless urbanism, the new geological deposits of sewage and garbage, surely no creature other than man has managed to foul his nest in such a short time.

From Dr Martin we had considerable evidence that air, when polluted grossly, causes disease mortality and morbidity. On an equal analogy the contamination of water so tellingly demonstrated by Mr Reed produces mortality and morbidity as yet unknown.

As Professor Warren has said, our soil contamination produces death and disease in other animals. It is reasonable to suppose it does so also in human beings.

How are we to link cause and effect? Only by a careful ongoing and continuous study of morbidity, in the areas where contamination can definitely be proven, and by comparison of its pattern with the pattern of morbidity of the rest of the country and the world. What conditions appear to be involved? Surely respiratory diseases, psychiatric and neurotic and neurological disease, cardiovascular diseases, congenital disorders and the whole realm of oncology.

The next step must be to complement causational research with careful studies into the effect on morbidity. For this finance and governmental help is required. "Play for more than you can afford to lose, and you will learn the Game" said Winston Spencer Churchill. "And as we lengthen and elaborate the chain of technology that intervenes between us and the natural world, we forget that we become steadily more vulnerable to even the slightest failure in that chain."

PAUL B. SEARS

Correspondence

ASH

Sir,

I am writing not only as President of the Royal College of General Practitioners but as a Council member of ASH (Action on Smoking and Health Ltd.) to tell you of the progress made by this charitable organization.

You will remember that ASH was established in January 1971 on the initiative of the Royal College of Physicians, following the publication of their second Report on Smoking and Health, with the objects of uniting all bodies interested in preventing or reducing the smoking of cigarettes, of spreading information about the dangers of smoking and of carrying out research on how to help people to stop smoking.

ASH is now well established and has received initial support from the Department of Health and Social Security. It has set up a number of working committees, has held a conference and has plans for a number of important projects. It needs further support, however, both in the forms of members and of financial aid.

If your readers are sympathetic to the aims of ASH, I hope they will consider becoming members

of this association and possibly also sending a contribution to its funds. I feel it is most important to get ASH firmly established. Correspondence should be addressed to The Director General, Action on Smoking and Health Ltd., 11 St. Andrew's Place, Regent's Park, London, NW1 4LB.

G. I. WATSON.

Peaslake,
Guildford.

Oral contraception study

Sir,

Doctors who are taking part in the Oral Contraception Study of the Royal College of General Practitioners have received a news letter from the recorder, Dr Kay.

He says: "The analyses of morbidity while confirming most of the expected differences between Takers and Controls have also shown that the magnitude of these differences is less than anticipated. It is even more encouraging that no new important side effect of the Pill has emerged, although 25,000 women-years experience of the oral contraceptives is now available for analysis.

Nevertheless, a much longer period of observation is necessary before confident statements on the safety of the Pill could be contemplated."

He goes on to suggest that the study should continue for another seven years and that there should be no publication of results in the meantime.

Surely his judgment is wrong in this?

The women of this country should be told now about the results of the study. In seven years time the Pill may well be obsolete as a form of contraception and the results will then be of value to no one. In the meantime women are continually worried by alarming statements in the national press about the dangers of the Pill, which are certainly not based on anything like 25,000 women-years experience.

Dr Kay says: "We believe that publication of our results would prejudice the continuation of the study by biasing the participating doctors". This is surely a very minor and secondary consideration compared to the importance of letting women have more information about the Pill as soon as possible.

A. P. MILLAR.

Benson,
Oxford, OX9 6SA

The language of Research

Sir,

As every schoolboy knows, Alphonse Karr, in 1849, coined the useful and elegant little phrase, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. This was a successful exercise in communication because he knew what he meant, you know what he meant, and I know what he meant. All the customers were satisfied. Now the Research Unit in its little sub-title (The Diagnostic Index) comes up with a new one, *tout ça change, tout c'est Le même chose*. This is not so good. I don't know what it means, I am doubtful if you do, and horribly

afraid that *they* don't. Admittedly Alphonse had the advantage of being a Frenchman, and of knowing that *chose* is feminine, and though we may boggle at the illogical and ungallant conduct of that usually courteous people making 'a thing' feminine, it does, and we are stuck with it.

In my usual simple and trusting way, I struggle to remain confident that the Research Unit checks its scientific references more thoroughly than would appear to be the case with its literary ones. I hope.

JOHN MILES.

World Conference on General Practice

Sir,

The closing date for submission of papers for the 5th World Conference on General Practice has been extended to January 1, 1972.

Intending participants are asked to submit their papers for selection in the form that has been detailed and included with the Social Programme which is now being distributed.

If you are unable to obtain a copy of this information, or you require further details, please write to

The Executive Secretary,
5th World Conference on General Practice,
254 Albert St.,
East Melbourne, Vic., 3002, Australia.

Registrations will be received up to the time of the Conference, but late registrations will incur a late fee. The previously advertised closing date has been cancelled.

The administration greatly appreciates early registration, so please forward your completed forms as soon as possible, or at least notify us of your intention to register. Accommodation cannot be guaranteed after June 30, 1972, and will depend on availability.

JON A. BAKER.

Book reviews

A first notebook of head injury. Second edition.
K. G. JAMIESON, M.D., M.S., F.R.A.C.S., F.A.C.S.
London. Butterworth & Co. Ltd. 1971.
Pp. vii + 148. Price: £1.60.

This paperback, written by an Australian neurosurgeon, presents the problems of head-injury in an original way. Part I deals with the coverings of the brain, ie, scalp injuries, fractures, extra-dural haematoma etc. Part II is concerned with damage to the brain itself. Part III with the clinical course of these conditions. Part IV with physiology and nursing care, and Part V with general management of the patient, special investigations, rehabilitation, etc.

J. ROY. COLL. GEN. PRACTIT., 1971, 21, 687

The book is a well-designed and carefully thought-out survey of the subject by a man who is obviously master of it. There are few general practitioners, especially those working in isolated areas, who will not benefit from reading it. In Australia the vast distances make an early assessment of head-injury even more important than in the UK—it is for this reason that the operative treatment of extra-dural and sub-dural haematoma are described in some detail.

The text is enlivened by line-drawings, some purely informative, some slightly whimsical, as where the 'unresponsive pupil' is illustrated by a schoolgirl asleep at her desk and the 'roving eye'