

the original varicella infection, this may explain why lesions occurred in other parts of the body. The patient made a good recovery with parenteral acyclovir.

If further experience and control studies confirm that ultrasound is effective in providing pain relief in this condition, possible side-effects must also be considered.

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Doctors and nuclear war — a point of view

Sir,

To any observer in outer space, the behaviour of mankind on this planet must appear utterly incomprehensible and absurd. In a large part of the world the population is starving, while the opulent superpowers are spending untold wealth on building up greater and greater nuclear arsenals, which neither side can really afford. Like the proverbial lemmings, they seem bent on self-destruction. Perhaps one may concede that 30 years ago, the ownership of a few atom bombs did offer a safeguard of sorts in a war weary world in which millions of lives had been lost and many fine cities destroyed; furthermore the real meaning of war was still a horrid memory to the survivors. Today things are quite different, and the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons is an illusion. As neither side can agree as to what constitutes equality in armaments, the conflict for supremacy between the USA and the USSR continually escalates, and it has become a grotesque and dangerous power struggle. It is as if the super-powers and their allies were building dams to withstand some deluge. Unfortunately the dam is never high enough or strong enough, so the wealth of nations is being squandered on adding more and more to their protective walls. It is obvious that in the long run this exercise must be self-defeating, as one day a wall in the dam will crack, and civilization or even life itself, will be swept away in the flood.

It seems as if politicians on both sides of the Iron Curtain are not seriously thinking in terms of a real solution to the problem; they are content with threats and counter-threats. When one side makes a suggestion, it is rejected brusquely in a matter of days or even hours. There seems little hope of the contenders sitting down for long and

meaningful discussion. An intelligent and dispassionate look at the problem, combined with a determination step by step to find a way out, seems beyond the capability of the negotiators. Lip service is paid to the United Nations, but any practical suggestion by that body falls on deaf ears. Surely with all our native wit we should be able to find a real and lasting solution. Unfortunately the intelligence of the thinking man is always superior to that of any group. Crowds are unable to reason, they are swayed by emotions, and rarely give heed to constructive arguments. The morals and ability of most gatherings tend to be those of the lowest common denominator, rather than the best efforts of individuals present. This applies to politicians, who in general have to abide by a common policy if they are to earn any promotion, and as a result of this nothing constructive is done. Those with good ideas are often muted by the party, or ejected from office. A modern example of this apathy was shown in the reluctance of any party to insist on the wearing of safety belts by car drivers. It has taken years for them to accept expert advice, and yet once adopted, within a month of their use, the morbidity figures for accidents fell significantly. This sterile attitude of mind applies to most of the world leaders, motivated as they are by an overweening desire for power, combined with a determination to stay in office. They pay far more attention to vote catching than they do to the dull grind of solving difficult problems.

In this depressing situation, what can the thinking man do? It is clear that the most pressing problem of this age is the danger accruing from the stock piling of nuclear armaments. It has been estimated that the present stores on both sides contain the equivalent of two and a half tons of TNT for every man, woman and child on this planet. This enormous hazard will not disappear if we just pretend it does not exist.

The cream of the intelligentsia lies largely among the professions, and they all bear a heavy load of responsibility. All thinking people must pay far more attention to this issue. Somehow or other nuclear disarmament must be accomplished, and this will only be achieved if there is give and take on both sides in an atmosphere of trust. This basic attitude of mutual respect is in fact attainable today, but only in certain quarters. When people of different nations meet with a strong common interest, respect is soon established. The cultural barrier between East and West has been successfully breached by athletes when they meet and mix freely on easy terms, as do the musicians and artists of all kinds. In the scientific world there is some communication, and this sort of activity needs to be extended by meetings between members of the same professions. There are a number of such organizations such as the Medical Association for the Prevention of War,* and these bodies exist in the USA, USSR, Britain and many other lands. These groups need to be encouraged and enlarged. The medical profession,

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by way of the BMA, was asked to advise on the medical aspects of civil defence in this nuclear age. The report by acknowledged experts makes gloomy reading. They decided that under the weight of a nuclear attack, the medical services would collapse, and rapidly disappear completely. Only the most primitive forms of first aid would be available to any survivors. This means that all the schemes the Government has for defence against nuclear attack are a complete waste of time and money. Their suggestions are no more than a propaganda exercise, ostensibly to give the impression that our masters have the matter well in hand.

Among their mountains, the Swiss have made elaborate preparations for a nuclear war; these bomb shelters could well be successful, since, as a neutral, Switzerland would not be subjected to a direct nuclear attack and the shelters would work well against the fallout of bombs dropped at a distance. They would be quite useless in a country such as Britain, which would be saturated with bombs and rockets. There is just no defence against nuclear attack except disarmament. Doctors are by tradition healers, and in this situation they have a special duty to exert themselves to bring about the greatest challenge ever in preventive medicine, the abolition on all sides of this ghastly tool of mass destruction. For too long, most of us have buried our heads in the sand.

For centuries Christians have sought to define a just war, but there is no way in which a nuclear conflict can be made morally acceptable. All the Churches should unite to condemn such forms of warfare. This has been done by all the American Roman Catholic bishops. All denominations should follow the brave stand of the Quakers. The protagonists for increased armaments tell us that the only alternative to more and more nuclear weapons is a Russian take-over. This event is highly unlikely, but should it happen, that would be infinitely preferable to a nuclear war. We were overrun by the Romans and later by the Normans, but in the end we have emerged as a proud independent nation. Any foreign occupation would be preferable to a nuclear holocaust. Paul Oestreicher put it so clearly when he said that every tyranny has its day, it can never last for ever; but from the nuclear desert there is no way back.

Doctors must be positive and active in this matter. They must assist or if necessary cajole the politicians into finding methods for nuclear disarmament to take place on both sides of the Iron Curtain. If we just allow things to drift along as we are doing today, our intelligence, our superb technical skills, together with our moral bankruptcy and total inability to control armaments, will all combine to be the end of us. Maybe because of our arrogance and greed we deserve no better fate, but it seems a fearful thing that we should have the power to drag the rest of life on earth to destruction.

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What is Family forum?

Sir,

Family Forum was set up in 1980 as an alliance of family organizations. It aims to bring together people working with the family both at national and local level. Member organizations' particular interests range across the family life cycle from prenatal health to the care of the elderly. Their interests range, too, from the general, such as child health and the relations between schools and parents, to more specific areas of concern, such as the welfare of children in hospital.

At national level the Forum regularly holds conferences — the most recent highlighted the 'family dimension' of unemployment. It was attended by 131 delegates, of whom 54 were unemployed. A video film, made especially for the conference, showed the effects of long-term unemployment — emotional as well as financial — on four families in the Bath area. This was followed by brief statements from members of unemployed families and from people working in the caring agencies who were trying to help such families cope with debts, with mental illness and with the apathy and frustration which lack of work brings. Discussion groups focussed on the issues raised by the film and by these statements and brought together young people, wives and mothers, unskilled workers, skilled workers and professional people to share ideas and discuss strategies for coping with common problems.

Last winter, a conference on the topic of conciliation services was arranged jointly by Family Forum and four other organizations (Gingerbread, The National Family Conciliation Council, the National Marriage Guidance and One Parent Families). There had been considerable disappointment about the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Conciliation (The Booth Committee). The conference brought together people with wide-ranging interests who were concerned about the future of conciliation services, particularly out-of-court services. These included probation officers, solicitors, those working with children both in statutory and voluntary services, academics, representatives from churches and from family conciliation services across the country.

As a result of the conference a liaison group was set up and one of its members (Lisa Parkinson, NFCC) attended a meeting with the Lord Chancellor to put the case for a more thorough assessment of the value of out-of-court services. Shortly afterwards it was announced that two of the five services to be monitored by the Department were to be out-of-court services.

A very recent and continuing topic of concern has been the response of member organizations to the three government review bodies investigating social security benefits. A meeting was called to enable member organizations to find out at first hand what each other's response would be. Family Forum itself submitted general statements to each review committee stressing the need for a wider study of the benefit system as a whole and one which also included the income tax system. It outlined Family Forum's concern for a life cycle approach to benefits and