

"SPEAKING OUT" ON HEALTH ISSUES

To the Editor:

There is almost always before our nation the discussion of some form of medical quackery, yet we do not often hear from our academic leaders on these matters. Perhaps they do not realize that their opinions on these matters are valued by the thinking public and even more so by the practising physician who daily has to educate his patients along these lines and would be greatly aided by official, *public* support.

At present in Canada there are at least three matters under consideration: fluoridation of drinking water, investigation of chiropractic in Quebec, and inquiry into the Workmen's Compensation Board in British Columbia which includes chiropractic and naturopathic care in its "medical" benefits. I feel that comments by the university professors on these topics would help bring about useful solutions to the problems.

That I am not alone in this feeling is apparent by the following quotation which brought the whole matter freshly to mind. It is by Dr. F. J. Stare (*J. A. M. A.*, 184: 635, 1963) of the Harvard School of Public Health: "I have always felt that professors in our schools of medicine and public health, and other leaders in the health professions, are falling down on the job if they don't speak out clearly and emphatically on health quackery and nonsense, be it food faddism, antifuoridation propaganda, or cancer 'cures'." Dr. Stare recently successfully survived a libel suit and has other good comments on "speaking out".

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"RESEARCH" IN CAR CRASHING

To the Editor:

The undersigned recently attended a sporting event of considerable medical interest. This report is presented to bring the attention of interested physicians to bear on comparable activities and foster further scientific enquiry. This event was advertised as an "Automobile Demolition Derby", and in less polysyllabic promotions as a "Car Crashing Contest". In order to grasp the physiological implications of the activities involved a brief description of the rules and procedures of the game is warranted.

The object of the entertainment is to demolish automobiles by collision, the contestants being the drivers, the winner being the operator of the last vehicle able to move under its own power. At the particular program attended, 100 cars were utilized, in a series of four heats of 25 units each. In addition, there was a play-off with eight participants, these consisting of the drivers of the last two cars operating in each of the preceding encounters. Each match is initiated by a shouted "count-down" (10...9...8...go!) from the audience. It was soon apparent that certain techniques had developed for the game.

The contestants use ordinary road vehicles of about 10 years' vintage with no special equipment, the windows turned down and the doors lashed shut. The only safety apparatus is a safety belt, and crash helmets are worn. Since the automobile is operationally vulnerable anteriorly, it is a principle that the front end of the vehicle is to be protected, and the rear end used for offence. As a result, the area of activity is at first

a seething mass of vehicles maneuvering in an attempt to reverse into each other at a maximum possible velocity. As would be expected, there is in the initial phases of each heat limited control of this variable, and a host of variations occur with an inevitable decrease in the number of active participants. The survivors, liberated by the more predictable circumstances, assume a much greater accuracy and velocity, till tail-to-tail collisions of net speeds of probably 50 miles per hour or more are possible. The fate of the machines involved is a matter of considerable engineering interest, but it is with the human element that we are concerned here.

The drivers are subject to a large variety of forces, from a multitude of directions, differing greatly in intensity, and both predictable and unpredictable to the busy contestant. Their heads, in the large white helmets which are customary, were in particular noted to flail through a great range of movement in response to the impacts involved. In spite of these factors, no significant injuries occurred. The pit steward of the race track involved reported that there were no injuries to any of the 92 drivers participating in this event, and this was confirmed by the agent of the insurance company covering any medical consequences. Both of these informants say that serious injury is uncommon on this track, and cervical injury in particular is extremely rare.

Most important perhaps from the medical point of view is the fact that a substantial percentage of these several thousand collisions were mechanically comparable to the rear-end accidents so common on our streets today. The absence of any cervical consequences has major implications for any consideration of the genesis of the "whip-lash" syndrome.

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IDIOPATHIC MYOCARDITIS OF PREGNANCY

To the Editor:

Concerning the excellent case report by Dr. W. M. Goldberg of a fatal case of idiopathic myocarditis of pregnancy (*Canad. Med. Ass. J.*, 88: 1247, 1963), may I suggest that the possibility that this condition is primarily due to a sensitivity reaction or vasculitis of the myocardium should be considered. MacMahon and MacLetchie have discussed vasculitis as a condition which affects the heart muscle, among other tissues. The literature on allergy contains a good many references to cases in which rapid heart action, irregular heart action, and angina were repeatedly demonstrated to follow ingestion of certain foods, etc. It seems at least reasonable to suggest that something related to the pregnant state may cause, in a suitably sensitized individual, the state of inflammation, or vasculitis, of the heart, liver, or kidneys, respectively in cases of "idiopathic" myocarditis, hepatitis, or eclampsia. The inflammatory state can be caused by an immunity reaction (infection) to the presence of living organisms, or by the sensitivity reaction (allergy) to non-viable substances. Has any other cause of inflammation ever been definitely demonstrated?

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