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EPIDEMIOLOGY OF NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE
Scientific Editor . . . . . E. D. ACHESON

* MANAGEMENT OF RENAL FAILURE
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CONTENTS OF VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN

NUMBER 1. Epidemiology of Non-Communicable Disease

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>E. D. Acheson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation of screening procedures</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A. L. Cochrane &amp; W. W. Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory disease in childhood</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>J. R. T. Colley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer in Africa</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Paula J. Cook &amp; D. P. Burkitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular disease and the mineral content of drinking water</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M. D. Crawford, M. J. Gardner &amp; J. N. Morris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted effects of drugs</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Richard Doll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidemiology of some common conditions</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>P. C. Elwood &amp; J. M. Weddell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>J. Grimley Evans &amp; Geoffrey Rose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Epidemics of rare diseases | 43 | E. G. Knox |
Early environmental influences on the development of intelligence | 48 | Thomas McKeown & R. G. Record |
Pneumoconiosis and coal dust exposure | 53 | Stewart Rae |
International studies in chronic respiratory disease | 59 | D. D. Reid & C. M. Fletcher |
The epidemiological importance of childhood cancers | 64 | Alice Stewart & Renate Barber |
Epidemiology of asbestos cancers | 71 | J. C. Wagner, J. C. Gilson, G. Berry & V. Timbrell |
International comparisons in the study of the functional psychoses | 77 | J. K. Wing |
Rheumatic complaints | 82 | Philip H. N. Wood |

Notes on Contributors 89
Book Reviews 92

NUMBER 2. Management of Renal Failure

Scientific Editor: M. D. MILNE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>D. A. K. Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of the acute uraemic emergency</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Oliver Wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical aspects of acute renal failure</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>Ralph Shackman &amp; A. E. Kulatilake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical aspects of chronic renal failure</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>Philip Clark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renal failure in the first year of life</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>T. M. Barratt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renal failure in the tropics</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>M. S. R. Hutt &amp; A. J. Wing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension and chronic renal failure</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>J. J. Brown, G. Düsterdieck, R. Fraser, A. F. Lever, J. I. S. Robertson, M. Tree &amp; R. J. Weir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaemia in renal failure</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>D. G. Penington &amp; Priscilla Kincaid-Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antibiotics in renal failure</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Francis O'Grady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiology in the diagnosis of renal failure</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>I. Kelsey Fry &amp; W. R. Cattell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complications of renal failure and their response to dialysis</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>J. Siddiqui &amp; D. N. S. Kerr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary treatment of chronic renal failure</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>J. D. Blainey &amp; M. J. Chamberlain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peritoneal dialysis</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>J. Henry Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance haemodialysis in hospital</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>J. R. Curtis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermittent haemodialysis in the home</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>B. H. B. Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The present status of renal transplantation</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>John Swinney</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes on Contributors 186
Book Reviews 189
INDEX TO VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN

Names printed in capitals are those of authors who have contributed papers. Titles of books are printed in italics.

A
ACHESON, E. D.: Epidemiology of noncommunicable disease. Introduction to symposium, 1
Aldosterone, relation to blood-pressure regulating system, 132
Amnesia, anterograde, 244
Amyloidosis, renal, 100
Anuria from birth, 115
Aphasia: Aphasology and other aspects of language, 289
Armitage, P.: Statistical methods in medical research, 92
Arteriovenous shunt for maintenance haemodialysis, 170, 175
Arthritis, epidemiology, 83
—— prevention, 75
Associated learning, 281
Asthma deaths due to pressurized aerosols, 27
Attention, defects in children, 229
—— selective, 253
Autistic children, linguistic impairment, 228
Avoidance learning, 280

B
BADDELEY, A. D. & PATTERTON, K.: Relation between long-term and short-term memory, 237
BARBER, R., see STEWART, A., 64
BARRATT, T. M.: Renal failure in the first year of life, 115
BERRY, G., see WAGNER, J. C., 71
Biographical notes on contributors, 89, 186, 289
BLACK, D. A. K.: Management of renal failure. Introduction to symposium, 95
Blood, cancer, distribution pattern in Africa, 19
—— disorders, and chronic renal failure, 113
BLAINEY, J. D. & CHAMBERLAIN, M. J.: Dietary treatment of chronic renal failure, 160
Blood changes in renal failure, 104
—— pressure, effect of salt intake, 39
—— indirect, measurement, 8
—— measurement, problems, 37
Blood-sugar level, screening tests, 5
BLOOMFIELD, J. R., see HOWARTH, C. I., 253
Bone disease, renal, response to dialysis, 153
Breast, carcinoma, diagnostic screening, 4
BROADBENT, D. E.: Cognitive psychology. Introduction to symposium, 191
BRYANT, P. E.: Cognitive development, 200
BURKITT, D. P., see COOK, P. J., 14
—— Wright, D. H. et al.: Burkitt's lymphoma, 92
Burkitt's lymphoma, distribution pattern, 19
Burkitt's lymphoma, 92
C
Cancer, cerebral, in children, 68
—— childhood, and antenatal irradiation, 66
—— and congenital defects, 69
—— epidemiology, 64
—— latent periods in development, 67
—— sibship concordance, 69
—— distribution pattern in Africa, 15
—— due to asbestos, epidemiology, 14
Carcinogenic drugs, 29
Cardiovascular mortality, relation to mineral content of water, 21
CATTELL, W. R., see FRY, I. K., 148
Cerebral cortex, role in learning and memory, 278
CHAMBERLAIN, M. J., see BLAINEY, J. D., 160
Children, cancer, epidemiological importance, 64
—— cognitive deficits, 227
—— respiratory disease, epidemiology, 9
CLARK, P.: Surgical aspects of chronic renal failure, 109
INDEX TO VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN

L

Language, acquisition, effects on cognitive development, 111
— biological and social factors in psycholinguistics, 288
— disorders, 211
— Aphasology and other aspects of language, 289
— hazard specialization, 273
— knowledge of, structure, 197
— psycholinguistics, 195
— recognition of, 196

Learning, cerebral lateralization, 280
— complex, neurological basis, 278
— decorticate, 279
— failure in children, 229
— perceptual, and adaptation, 248
— theory, 266

Leukaemia in children, mortality, 64
— previous infection, 67
— LEVER, A. F., see BROWN, J. J., 128

Linguistic impairment in children, 227
— knowledge, structure of, 197

Liver, cancer, distribution pattern in Africa, 15
— lobectomy, frontal, hemispheric differences
— temporal, hemispheric differences after, 274

N

Nephrectomy and hypertension, 132
— Nepritits, interstitial, acute, 99
— nephropathy, analgesic, 100
— nephropathy, lipoid, 100
— nephritic syndrome, dietary treatment, 160
— neuropathy, peripheral, in renal failure, response to dialysis, 157

O

O'BRIEN, N. & HERMELIN, B.: Cognitive deficits in children, 227
— Oesophagus, cancer, distribution pattern in Africa, 18

INDEX TO VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN
INDEX TO VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN

RECORD, R. G., see McKEOWN, T., 48
REID, D. D. & FLETCHER, C. M.: International studies in chronic respiratory disease, 59
Relevance, determination, 256
Renal ischaemia, controlled, in renal surgery, 107
— venous thrombosis in infancy, 117
Renin-angiotensin system, relation to blood-pressure regulation, 132, 133
Research, medical: Medical research: priorities and responsibilities, 190
Respiratory disease, chronic, international studies, 59
— — — — migrant population studies, 62
— — — — occupational samples, 61
— — — — population samples, 61
— — — — in childhood, epidemiology, 9
— — — — mortality trends, 9
— — — — social factors, 10
Rheumatic complaints, distribution, 86
Rheumatology, Modern trends in urology: 3, 189
Rickeis, Sir E. (editor): Modern trends in urology: 3, 189
Rickeis, renal, response to dialysis, 154
ROBERTSON, J. I. S., see BROWN, J. J., 128
ROBINSON, B. H. B.: Intermittent haemodialysis in the home, 173
ROSE, G., see EVANS, J. G., 41
Royal College of Physicians of London: Air pollution and health, 93
RUSSELL, I. S.: Neurological basis of complex learning, 278
S
Saline excess, treatment, 101
— level in renal failure, 97
Salt intake and blood pressure, 39
Scar epithelioma, distribution pattern in Africa, 19
Schizophrenia, international comparisons in study, 77
Schwarz, K.: Preventive medicine in medical care, 93
Sciatica, epidemiology, 83
Screening: The health check in practice, 93
— — Preventive medicine in medical care, 93
— — procedures, 3
— test methods, validation, 6
Search, visual, 253
Seeing, 219
SHACKMAN, R. & KULATILAKE, A. E.: Surgical aspects of acute renal failure, 103
Shouksmith, G.: Intelligence, creativity and cognitive style, 288
SIDDIQUI, J. & KERR, D. N. S.: Complications of renal failure, 153
Skill, acquisition, 266
Sounds, interpretation of, 219
Spearman’s factor theory of cognitive ability, 222
Speech, artificial, 220
— — — — cerebral localization, 212
— — — — dysfunction, 211
— — — — linguistic studies, 213
— — — — neurological studies, 211
— — — — impairment in children, 227
— — — — perception, 195
— — — — recognition, 196, 219
Statistical methods in medical research, 92
STEWART, A. & BARBER, R.: The epidemiological importance of childhood cancers, 64
Stimuli, analysis, times for, 259
Stimulus—response compatibility, 263
Stomach, cancer, distribution pattern in Africa, 19
Stress: Decision and stress, 289
SWINNEY, J.: The present status of renal transplantation, 181
T
Thalidomide and phocomelia, 26
Therapy, antibacterial, pharmacokinetics, 143
Thrombo-embolism due to steroid contraceptives, 27
Thorndike’s multiple factor analysis of cognitive ability, 223
TIMBRELL, V., see WAGNER, J. C., 71
Tissue perfusion rate and hypertension, 131
Toxicology and chemical carcinogenesis, 131
Toxemia, pre-eclamptic, microangiopathy in, 139
Tracheo-oesophageal fistula, congenital, epidemiology, 44
Transitivity experiments, 201
Tranylcypromine, paroxysmal headache due to, 28
TREE, M., see BROWN, J. J., 128
Tuberculosis, diagnostic screening, 5
Tumours: Burkitt’s lymphoma, 92
— — distribution patterns in Africa, 15
U
Uraemia, acute, management, 97
— — anaesthesia in, 107
— — management, 101
Urea ratios in renal failure, 104
Urinary obstruction, and chronic renal failure, 113
Urinary tract, obstruction, in tropics, 123
Urine output in renal failure, 104
Urography, hazards in renal failure, 151
Urology: Modern trends in urology: 3, 189
Uterus, cervix, cancer, distribution pattern in Africa, 19
— — carcinoma, diagnostic screening, 4

V
Varicose veins, epidemiology, 33, 35
Ventricular function, screening tests, 7
Verbal learning tests, 274, 276
Vernon, P. E.: Analysis of cognitive ability, 222
Vision, artificial, 219
— — hemispheric specialization, 272
— — psychology, 219
Visual distortion, adaptation to, 248
— — search strategies, 254
Visual—motor adaptation, 249
— — conditions for, 251
— — discordance, adaptation to, 248

W
Wagner, J. C., Gilson, J. C., Berry, G. & Timbrell, V.: Epidemiology of asbestos cancers, 71
Warrington, E. K.: Neurological disorders of memory, 243
Wason, P. C.: Problem solving and reasoning, 206
Water, mineral content, relation to cardiovascular mortality, 21
Weddell, J. M., see Elwood, P. C., 32
Weir, K. J., see Brown, J. J., 128
Wing, A. J., see Hutt, M. S. R., 122
Wing, J. K.: International comparisons in the study of the functional psychoses, 77
— — see Hare, E. H., 93
Wood, P. H. N.: Rheumatic complaints, 82
Word recognition, 196
Wright, D. H., see Burkitt, D. P., 92
Wrong, O.: Management of the acute uremic emergency, 97
Wyke, M.: Dysphasia: review of recent progress, 211
**Epidemiology of Non-Communicable Disease**

Like so many words, "epidemiology" has changed its meaning over the years. It is not mentioned in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English language*, although, not surprisingly in 1775, *epidemick*—"that which falls at once upon great numbers of people as a plague"—is mentioned. Its original usage was to describe "that branch of medical science which treats of epidemics"¹, but it is now widely understood to be "a science that deals with the incidence, distribution, and control of disease in a population"² whether or not the disease in question is epidemic or communicable.

As Knox points out in his paper in this issue of the *British Medical Bulletin*, with the help of modern statistical and computational techniques even rare diseases (such as tracheobronchial fistula with congenital oesophageal atresia) may now be recognized as having sporadic epidemic properties. Readers of this issue may feel that the implications of epidemiological techniques have

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