

Howard and Valori (October 1989 *JRSM*, p 606) concluded that the wearing of tinted spectacles is a valid indicator of psychological distress, and that this obsession should lead to earlier recognition of psychological distress.

However, I have met people who used tinted spectacles only because the optician said so. *All* his prescriptions were tinted.

ARNOLD E BENDER President  
Institute of Food Science and Technology

### The glucagonoma syndrome

We read the excellent case report by Price *et al.* (September 1989 *JRSM*, p 553) with interest. Unfortunately in the discussion a common fallacy is perpetuated. Thus streptozotocin, while cytotoxic to the rat beta cell, does not affect the normal human beta cell at the doses employed to treat islet cell tumours. The limiting factor in streptozotocin therapy is usually renal toxicity but, if there is no preexisting renal problem, this is not a serious risk and at the correct dose and streptozotocin is well worth trying. Similarly although somatostatin inhibits insulin secretion, as the authors mention, this is counter-balanced by delayed absorption of food and inhibition of counter-regulatory hormones, namely growth hormone and glucagon. In the case of a glucagonoma the inhibition of glucagon is usually enough to restore impaired carbohydrate tolerance to normal in spite of the concomitant inhibition of insulin secretion. Although many glucagonomas may suppress poorly with somatostatin, it is a treatment which is immediately reversible and therefore also worthy of therapeutic trial.

P H SONKSEN Professor of Endocrinology  
S R BLOOM Professor of Endocrinology  
Royal Postgraduate Medical School  
Hammersmith Hospital, London

### Honey - a remedy rediscovered

I must agree with the content of the Editorial by Zumla and Lulat (July 1989 *JRSM*, p 384) as I have found honey to be a very effective medication in the treatment of infected wounds, eg vulvectomy, infected perineum, infected abdominal wall wound or breakdown of the abdominal wall scar.

The article makes a point that it is rather difficult to work out how it acts. I agree but I do know that it does act and is a very simple treatment. It is not offensive in odour, the wound does not stick, the patient does not have any pain on dressing the wound. It reduces the risk of further infection, it reduces the risk of offensive smelly wound and reduces the incidence of plastic skin graft areas.

R J F MCINERNEY Sydney, Australia

### Our survival as a species

I have read the editorial by Razis (October 1989 *JRSM*, p 575) and I must admit that from this side of the Atlantic, as an American and a neurologist, I do not accept his viewpoint.

The forces that have molded the human nervous system have created a monumental instrument for survival. It does this not only by being able to move two arms and two legs, but also by being able

to create symbols, meaning, value and by being able to find beauty, ugliness, happiness and sadness in the world in which we live.

The mind is not divided into a new thinking therefore logical neocortex, and an old thinking therefore 'barbaric emotional mind'. Rather the brain is integrated in such a way that human conduct can have flexibility. In short just as a large genetic pool helps to insure that the forces of evolution are able to select out genes with survival potential though preferred multiplication, the potential for flexibility of human judgement assures us that many problems that face us will usually be approached in many unique and different ways.

Therefore, given the flexibility of mind that we possess it is unlikely that we will ever achieve a singular unanimity of human thought or action. Thus history in the future will no doubt be a continuation of both human competition and cooperation in many different forms and ways. No doubt the prize from all of this activity will be that some groups may cease existing in their present forms. No doubt while some groups will cease existing other groups will probably thrive, and those groups more than likely will be those that can produce the largest number of creative ideas and solutions for the problems that they face.

The true problem to be resolved in future history lies not in any recent singular events such as over population or the atomic bomb. The problem is rather the chorus of pessimistic voices which rather than work with man and human nature as it exists, continue to believe in a perfectibility of man and history. In this scheme man is not man at all, but rather a small uncomplaining part of one big world machine.

I for one remain optimistic in the belief that man as he exists now with all of his flaws, is extremely capable of finding solutions to problems which though complex may not be the worst that humanity has ever faced.

WALTER L NIEVES Director  
Headache Center of Hudson Valley  
Suffern, USA

### Biblical leprosy - a comedy of errors

I should like to comment on the interesting paper by Lloyd Davies and Lloyd Davies (October 1989 *JRSM*, p 622) having studied the subject myself<sup>1</sup>.

*Numbers Chap. 12 verse 10*

'... and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow'

Vitiligo or psoriasis is possible but the Hebrew text does not mention 'white' specifically and an exudative condition such as eczema should be considered, ie 'wet' as snow rather than 'white' as snow.

*Kings II Chap. 5 verses 1 and 14*

It is probable that Naaman had vitiligo or psoriasis and the latter is favoured.

*Kings II Chap. 5 verse 27*

Gehazi was punished for acquiring Naaman's disease. The Hebrew text does not mention 'white' specifically. *Chronicles II chapter 26 verses 19-21*

Assuming King Uzziah had discoid lupus erythematosus, by isolating himself from his kingdom he avoided sunlight exposure. More likely lack of knowledge meant isolation for those with chronic facial eruptions.

J L VERBOV Consultant Dermatologist  
Royal Liverpool Hospital