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Synopses of Papers Awaiting Publication

Female Arsonists. By T. G. TENNENT.

Fifty-six female patients in the Special Hospitals who had been involved in fire-raising activities after the age of 16 were compared with a group of controls matched in respect of age, sex and duration of stay in the hospital. In many respects the two groups were similar, the main differences being in respect of early parental separation (more common amongst the arsonists), overt aggressive behaviour (more common amongst controls), and disordered sexual behaviour (more common amongst arsonists). Otherwise these arsonists showed many of the features described in previous studies.

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Psychiatric Experience of the Abortion Act (1967). By N. A. TODD.

A survey is presented of all cases referred to Leverndale Hospital and the Victoria Infirmary, Glasgow, for consideration of termination of pregnancy in the first two years following the implementation of the Abortion Act, 1967. Thirty-eight were referred in 1968–69 and 78 in 1969–70. Therapeutic abortion was recommended in 71·5 per cent of cases. There was a very low incidence of major psychosis and mental deficiency, and a low incidence of history of previous psychiatric illness. The commonest diagnosis made was reactive depression, usually the product of social stress and personality factors. Grounds for termination were found more often with increasing age of the patient, and in the married more than in the single. Patients presenting after the third month of pregnancy are considered separately. Follow-up through general practitioners was made of the cases refused abortion, and one third were found to have obtained the operation elsewhere; no seriously adverse sequelae were reported.

Aspects included in the discussion are the respective roles of psychiatrist, general practitioner and gynaecologist, and the possibility of some form of appeal procedure for patients refused abortion.

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Depressive Illness, Pulse Rate and Forearm Blood Flow. By PETER NOBLE and MALCOLM LADER.

The forearm blood flow and pulse rate of 34 depressed patients were recorded before and after a course of ECT. Clinical improvement subsequent to ECT was accompanied by a significant increase in blood flow. It is suggested that depressive illness is associated with an inhibitory effect on muscle blood flow which may be mediated via hypothalamic control.

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The Age-distribution of Schizophrenia and Neurosis: Findings in a National Sample. By E. H. HARE, J. S. PRICE and E. T. O. SLATER.

The age-distribution of five diagnostic groups has been examined for 168,271 first-ever admissions to psychiatric hospitals in England and Wales during the two-year period 1965-1966. There is a remarkable similarity between age-distribution curves of schizophrenia and neurosis, and also between those of mania and psychotic depression. A possible explanation of this is that similarity in age-distribution reflects a similarity in environmental precipitating factors.

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