ness of such observers would devolve upon the casualty surgeon. If his judgment proved faulty and disaster followed the casualty surgeon could well be considered to have failed to provide reasonable care.

Professor Jennett is writing of his son, but sadly the parents of our patients are rarely of such calibre, and for that the harassed casualty officer tries to provide a safe substitute.

JOHN GARFIELD

Wessex Neurological Centre,
Southampton University Hospital,
Southampton

Blood-pressure control round the clock

SIR,—We are very aware of difficulties in adequately reviewing the extensive literature when writing about the treatment of hypertension. We are still surprised that Dr T Reybrouck and his colleagues (27 May, p 1386), in their interesting report of a carefully designed study on metoprolol, failed to quote our work when commenting on the 24-h control of blood pressure with atenolol therapy. They refer to the study of Douglas-Jones and Cruickshank,¹ which drew attention to the effectiveness of once-daily therapy with atenolol. This report elicited letters from Besterman² and from Kendall and Yates³ in which preliminary results with metoprolol were reported. Some doubts were raised about whether the data provided by Douglas-Jones and Cruickshank were adequate evidence that atenolol was satisfactory on a once-daily basis since they had relied on daily blood pressure measurements and had not examined the effect of exercise. We replied⁴ reporting a study, designed in collaboration with Dr Cruickshank, in which hourly blood-pressure readings over the 24 hours after atenolol therapy were recorded. We demonstrated that control was achieved in blood pressure, both before and after exercise, throughout the whole 24 hours, including the period after waking, which has been receiving increasing interest, but was not mentioned by Dr Reybrouck and his colleagues. This study answered in 1976 the criticism of the Douglas-Jones and Cruickshank paper which they now make.

We also drew attention to the difference in blood pressure control achieved on the first day of therapy compared with the better control on the 28th day, despite there being no difference in atenolol concentrations.⁵ This failure of the plasma atenolol levels to correlate with the duration or extent of control was reported in several verbal communications during 1976 and 1977. Our paper reporting this was not accepted, owing to lack of space, by several journals and its appearance in the literature was delayed.⁵

Studies of 24-h recordings of blood pressure in patients with essential and accelerated hypertension were first reported by one of us in 1961.^{6,7} These were followed by studies of 24-h recordings of blood pressure in patients on treatment with the hypotensive drugs then in use, a subject that editors at that time failed to find of interest and the paper lies unpublished.

We are pleased to note the increasing interest in this topic and, while appreciating the difficulties of editors, hope that they will be more sympathetic to articles reporting studies in which observations are made around the whole 24-h period. Indications are that editors

are now more aware of the potential importance of biological rhythmicity to therapeutics and that drug action may be significantly different depending upon the time of day treatment is given (27 May, p 1376). Comparative studies must take this possibility into consideration as well as being careful not to draw final conclusions if a variable has only been measured at one time in the 24 hours or only during the daytime; the experimental design of Dr Reybrouck and his colleagues does not allow all these questions to be answered for metoprolol, and further information will be awaited with interest.

MARTIN S KNAPP

City Hospital,
Nottingham

A M J WOOLFSON

Nuffield Department of Clinical
Biochemistry,
University of Oxford,
Radcliffe Infirmary,
Oxford

¹ Douglas-Jones, A P, and Cruickshank, J M, *British Medical Journal*, 1976, **1**, 990.

² Besterman, E, *British Medical Journal*, 1976, **1**, 1403.

³ Kendall, M J, and Yates, R A, *British Medical Journal*, 1976, **1**, 1404.

⁴ Woolfson, A M J, and Knapp, M S, *British Medical Journal*, 1976, **2**, 235.

⁵ Woolfson, A M J, and Knapp, M S, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1977, **70**, suppl 5, p 36.

⁶ Shaw, D B, Knapp, M S, and Davies, D H, *Demonstration to British Cardiac Society*, 1961.

⁷ Shaw, D B, Knapp, M S, and Davies, D H, *Lancet*, 1963, **2**, 797.

Frequency and dysuria in women

SIR,—The article by Professor A W Asscher (10 June, p 1531) on the management of the frequency and dysuria syndrome makes profitable reading, but it is not really tailored to the needs of the general practitioner. This syndrome, however, is primarily a community problem. Only 10% of women with symptoms bother to consult their doctor.¹ Less than 10% of patients seen by the general practitioner are referred to hospital specialists.²

Professor Asscher recommends a management approach involving a careful history, physical examination (including a pelvic examination), a precise bacteriological diagnosis, and a high vaginal swab to determine the vaginal flora and to exclude gonorrhoea. In this way precipitating factors can be identified and the precise problem can be defined in order to produce an individual management plan. Other hospital specialists have gone further, some even recommending routine suprapubic aspiration of urine.

We know that there are hazards in basing the prognosis of a disease on a biased population. For example, Professor Asscher points out that there is no evidence that repeated attacks of the syndrome in women lead to kidney failure. General practitioners have always felt intuitively that this was the case, yet only 10 years ago and in this journal we were led to believe otherwise.³ Even the aetiology of the syndrome can vary between hospital and general practice; one need only look at organisms isolated from hospital patients and general practice patients and consider the relative importance of *Escherichia coli*. Is it not equally likely that there are hazards in basing diagnostic and management norms on a hospital population?

I am sure that Professor Asscher's approach is ideal for women who arrive at his clinics, who will tend to have a frequently recurring or atypical problem. It will not be followed by most general practitioners and we should

not automatically assume that they are wrong. How should we behave when faced with this syndrome? Women with frequent attacks form only a small proportion of those seen in our surgeries. Twenty-nine women presenting with their first attack eight years previously were recently followed up in this practice. Half of them had not experienced any further symptoms at all; most of the remainder had had only two or three attacks.

Our patients can conveniently be divided into three categories for management purposes: women with infrequent attacks and few constitutional symptoms (the great majority), women with frequent attacks and few constitutional symptoms, and women with symptoms suggesting acute pyelonephritis. It would seem illogical to treat them all the same way.

There are problems in applying the Kass criterion to women with acute dysuria and frequency if one wishes to conclude that those without significant bacteriuria do not have a bacterial aetiology and do not require antibiotics.⁴⁻⁵ Many women with mild attacks get better on increased fluids and analgesics even in the presence of significant bacteriuria. If lower urinary tract symptoms are marked most clinicians would not want to wait for the result of bacteriological examination of the urine anyway. Little harm is done by prescribing a three-day course of, say, amoxicillin. If symptoms suggest acute pyelonephritis longer treatment is required and if attacks are frequent Professor Asscher's management plan will define the natural history more accurately. Rather than go to inordinate lengths to avoid a possibly unnecessary three-day course of a cheap and hardly dangerous antibiotic it might be better to encourage general practitioners to concentrate upon this latter group because they have distressing symptoms, and of course on children, in whom the disease is of particular significance.

DAVID BROOKS

Middleton, Manchester

¹ Waters, W E, *British Journal of Preventive and Social Medicine*, 1969, **23**, 263.

² Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, *Morbidity Statistics from General Practice, Second National Study 1970-71*. London, HMSO, 1974.

³ *British Medical Journal*, 1968, **3**, 600.

⁴ Brooks, D, and Maudar, J A, *Lancet*, 1972, **2**, 893.

⁵ Tapsall, W, et al, *Lancet*, 1975, **2**, 537.

SIR,—Professor A W Asscher's article entitled "Use of antibiotics: management of frequency and dysuria" (10 June, p 1531) is not confined to the role of this particular aspect of treatment in women with this symptom complex.

While re-emphasising the important distinction from a therapeutic point of view between those who have bacteriuria at the time of symptoms and those who do not, he fails to mention the postmenopausal oestrogen-deficient woman. Failure to recognise and treat the underlying problem in this large group of patients leads to much misery and considerable misuse of antibiotic therapy.

CLIVE GINGELL

Department of Urology,
Southmead Hospital,
Bristol

SIR,—Professor A W Asscher (10 June, p 1531) advises that a high vaginal swab should be taken and put into Stuart's medium in order to exclude gonorrhoea as a cause of frequency