force" are unlikely to be bettered in the foreseeable future by modern pharmacological and surgical substitutes.

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² Mendels, J, and Weinstein, N, *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 1972, **34**, 527.

³ Ransley, C, and Nixon, P G F, unpublished data.

⁴ Nixon, P G F, *Practitioner*. In press.

⁵ Kennedy, A, *Lancet*, 1957, **2**, 261.

⁶ Kagan, A R, and Levi, S, *Social Science and Medicine*, 1974, **8**, 225.

⁷ Nixon, P G F, et al, *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 1976, **10**, 54.

⁸ Mackenzie, J, *Diseases of the Heart and Aorta*. London, Oxford Medical Publications, 1908.

Prophylactic use of bronchodilators

SIR,—In your leading article "Bronchodilators, new and old" (14 August, p 387) you did not mention the prophylactic use of these drugs. When wheezing is produced by exercise or when nocturnal wheezing is a prominent clinical feature two puffs of a portable pressurised aerosol containing a long-acting β_2 -adrenoceptor stimulant such as salbutamol or terbutaline before exercising or going to bed at night frequently prevents wheezing occurring, and many young asthmatics who follow this advice can play games which would be impossible without such treatment beforehand.

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Mid-trimester termination

SIR,—With reference to your leading article on this subject (5 June, p 1357) we would like to report our series of mid-trimester abortions using a combination of intra-amniotic hypertonic urea and prostaglandin E_2 .

A series of 58 patients was analysed in 1973-4 at the North Middlesex Hospital, where the technique has since been adopted as the routine for second trimester abortion. Fifty-six of the patients were seeking mid-trimester abortions; one was a diabetic with an intrauterine death at 30 weeks and the last a patient who had suffered eclampsia at 21 weeks. Ureaphil (lyophilised urea powder) 80 g in 120 ml of physiological saline was employed, followed by 5 mg of prostaglandin E_2 , each drug being injected separately into the amniotic cavity after the extraction of as much liquor as possible. The continuing pregnancies varied in gestation from 14 to 22 weeks and the average induction interval was 11½ hours. There was no significant difference between nulliparous and multiparous patients. In one patient the method failed; the pregnancy was of some 15 weeks' gestation and the amniotic sac could not be identified; she was subsequently aborted successfully vaginally.

We did not encounter any complications due to the alleged increase in blood concentration of fibrin degradation products or a fall in fibrinogen level and platelet count. We did, however, observe two severe reactions to prostaglandin, with hypotension, bradycardia, shivering, and dyspnoea; one patient ruptured her uterus and in retrospect was probably unsuitable for the technique since she was a

grand multipara who had delivered five babies vaginally. The only other complication was an episode of haemoglobinuria in a patient who appears to have suffered an accidental intravenous injection of hypertonic urea. The urine of this patient contained 4 g of haemoglobin per litre. An intravenous infusion of dextrose produced a good diuresis and the urine was cleared of haemoglobin. The patient failed to abort after 24 hours and an oxytocin infusion was started, after which the cervix dilated and a dead fetus was delivered after 12 hours. There was no incidence of severe haemorrhage. Prophylactic antibiotics in the form of co-trimoxazole were administered for five days. Fourteen patients required evacuation of retained products of conception and a further two were readmitted for persistent vaginal bleeding, but in only one of these cases were chorionic villi retrieved. One patient was readmitted for pelvic infection in spite of prophylactic antibiotics.

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Effects of beta-blocking drugs on insulin-induced hypoglycaemia

SIR,—The report by Dr R J Newman (21 August, p 447) that acebutalol did not impair blood glucose recovery following insulin-induced hypoglycaemia complements the report by myself and Dr D Barnett (31 July, p 272) that atenolol did not impair blood glucose recovery under similar conditions. The cardioselective or β_1 -adrenergic blocking drugs thus offer a new therapeutic approach to the treatment of angina pectoris and hypertension in diabetic subjects since they would seem to be free of hypoglycaemic side effects.

The recovery of the blood glucose level from hypoglycaemia is dependent on several mechanisms, including hepatic glycogenolysis, lactate feedback from muscles to liver for gluconeogenesis, and decreased peripheral glucose uptake. The major mechanism involved is hepatic glycogenolysis and these results suggest that the adrenergic receptors mediating hepatic glycogenolysis are of the β_2 type. This hypothesis is further supported by the observation of Dr A G Leitch and others (14 February, p 365) that intravenous infusion of salbutamol, a β_2 stimulant, produced a rise in plasma glucose levels. The report by Dr Newman that metoprolol did delay the return to normoglycaemia and that it was not significantly different from propranolol is unexpected. The β_1 -blockers share the ability to antagonise the effects of catecholamines on the heart but differ in their effects on other tissues. Although Dr C Davidson and his colleagues (3 July, p 7) have shown that the antihypertensive activity of β -adrenergic antagonists is not significantly influenced by their ancillary pharmacological properties, these might be responsible for the differences

seen in the blood glucose recovery rates. The important ancillary properties of these β -blockers are shown in the table below.

There is no correlation between these ancillary pharmacological properties and the rate of blood glucose recovery from hypoglycaemia. The simple conclusion is that some β_1 -blockers are more specific than others. Atenolol and acebutalol are claimed to be highly specific β_1 -blockers and they would seem to have advantages over other β -blockers for use in subjects prone to hypoglycaemia.

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Hypertension as a problem of public health

SIR,—Currently the investigation and treatment of hypertension usually depends on the patient's consultation of his doctor for related or unrelated symptoms. Since hypertension is common and treatable and since it is often symptomless perhaps a public health approach to the problem would be best. As a pilot study a sharply demarcated population such as that of the Isle of Wight could be subjected to a full screening procedure and by experiment the best strategy for the investigation and treatment could be established. There is little doubt that the magnitude and importance of the problem of hypertension is such that it cannot be adequately dealt with within the current framework of medical practice.

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Treatment of blood/injury/illness phobia

SIR,—Most people know of someone who faints at the sight of blood. Many doctors may remember medical students in their own set—even themselves—who did so on the first day in the operating theatre or in casualty. It seems, then, not an uncommon part of the human repertory but one that may be outgrown—or treated. Our inquiries from veterinary surgeons suggest that it is peculiarly human. If injecting or operating on an animal they do not worry about bradycardic syncope in the animal—only in the watching human.

Some people are so afraid of blood, tissue injury, injections, and venepuncture that they refuse necessary medical and surgical procedures. In marked contrast to other phobias, who become tachycardic in the presence of the phobic stimuli and rarely faint, blood/injury/injection phobics after initial tachycardia become profoundly bradycardic and faint—a very effective avoidance mechanism.¹ Experience has shown, however, that they can be successfully treated using a behavioural approach^{2,3}—for example, by exposing them to the phobic stimuli in a graded way, perhaps while they are tilted slightly head-down to prevent the fainting.

We are particularly interested in treating

Beta-blocking agent	Cardioselectivity	Intrinsic sympathomimetic activity	Membrane stabilising activity	Blood glucose recovery from hypoglycaemia
Atenolol	+	—	—	No delay
Acebutalol	+	+	+	No delay
Metoprolol	+	—	—	Delayed
Propranolol	—	—	+	Delayed