to prescribe "conovid" or any future similar drug at the request of a Family Planning Association doctor. (In all fairness these have not so far been requested of me.)—I am, etc.,

Eastleigh, Hants.

H. W. C. FULLER.

Misuse of Electric Blankets

SIR,—In view of the relative severity of this winter it may be appropriate to reproduce these photographs showing (a) the unfortunate result of nursing an old lady with paraplegia and incontinence (at home) on an electric blanket and (b) rather less severe burns in a woman who was not incontinent but who had gone to sleep while the electric blanket beneath her was still switched on. Both blankets had been made by reputable firms to conform with the requirements of the British Standards Institution and had not of course been used in the proper way.

According to the Ministry of Health booklet *Accidents in the Home—Burns and Scalds* (enclosure to Circular 6/58 and H.M. 58:12) there are some 700 fatalities in the home each year from burns and scalds. In this publication burns from electric blankets are not specifically mentioned, but on the other hand non-fatal

(a)

(b)

accidents of this kind may not be so uncommon, and there is undoubtedly an increasingly large population at risk.

After seeing two such cases I questioned a consecutive series of habitual electric-blanket users among out-patient attenders to discover how strictly they complied with the manufacturers' instructions. Some of the answers were disturbing.

Medical Out-patients Regularly Using Electric Blankets

Female, aged 68.—Had not studied directions. Reads in bed before switching off blanket. Husband often switches it on again during the night.

Female, aged 64.—Switches it off before getting into bed.

Female, aged 80.—Husband insists on switching it off before getting into bed. "He is fussy."

Female, aged 66.—Rheumatoid arthritis. Switches it off on getting into bed according to the instructions, but always switches it on twice again during the night.

Female, aged 72.—Switches it off before getting into bed.

Female, aged 45.—Switches it off before going to sleep.

Male, aged 66.—Switches it off before getting into bed.

Male, aged 69.—Switches off before going to sleep.

Male, aged 67.—Complains of sudden attacks of unconsciousness. Lies on blanket for ten minutes while still switched on. Cannot remember directions.

Female, aged 76.—May sometimes go to sleep with it switched on. Once awoke and smelled the bed-clothes burning; the electric-blanket wire was red. Cannot remember directions.

Male, aged 74.—An engineer. Switches off before getting into bed. Knows of one person who burned the bed-clothes.

Female, aged 44.—Switches off before getting into bed. One night she forgot and perspired all night.

Female, aged 49.—Always pulls out the plug before getting into bed.

Female, aged 68.—Did not read the directions. Switches off before going to sleep.

Female, aged 14.—Did not read the directions. Keeps it on until she is warm in bed.

Female, aged 50.—Did not read the directions. Keeps it on until her husband comes to bed.

Male, aged 41.—Did not read the directions. Takes the plug out before getting into bed because the lead is in the way.

Male, aged 53.—Did not read the directions. Sometimes sleeps with it switched on. Thermostatic.

Male, aged 62.—Removes the blanket before getting into bed according to the directions.

Electric blankets sometimes have waterproof covers, and these would seem to be more suitable bed-warmers for the young and the very old. But, as occurred with the first of my patients, the waterproof cover may deteriorate with age. Similarly it may be safe to fall asleep on a blanket which is thermostatically controlled, but only until the thermostat becomes defective.

To meet the requirements of British Standards the instructions issued with each blanket must include "Do not go to sleep with the blanket switched on." People sometimes, however, fall asleep before they intend to, and surely it would be safer to advise, "Do not go to bed with the blanket switched on." On the other hand, it would appear that instructions supplied with electric blankets are ignored by at least a third of those for whom they are intended, and possibly a constantly intrusive reminder marked on the outer covering would be more effective.

Wherever the solution may lie, I feel that not enough considered thought is given to the dangers of lying on electricity.—I am, etc.,

Wolfsdale, Pembrokeshire.

EIRIAN WILLIAMS