

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT SYMPTOMS WOULD LEAD YOU TO APPREHEND THE ONSET OF (1) SAPRÆMIA AND (2) SEPTICÆMIA IN A LYING-IN WOMAN?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss A. M. Thieme, University College Hospital, Gower Street, London, W.C.

PRIZE PAPER.

(1) Sapræmia is a condition of septic intoxication, due to toxins or poisons derived from micro-organisms (saprophytes) feeding on dead tissue.

In former days this was mistaken for milk fever, owing to the fact that the milk makes its appearance in the breasts also on the third day.

Conditions necessary for the occurrence of sapræmia are threefold:—(1) The saprophytes may be introduced by dirty hands and instruments of the attendant, or due to dirty surroundings and clothes of the patient.

(2) Dead tissue, on which the saprophytes feed. These may be retained clots, or portions of deceased placenta or membranes.

(3) Absorptive tissue, which may be the placental site or the lacerated cervix, vaginal or perineal surface.

The symptoms which would lead me to suspect the onset of sapræmia in a lying-in woman are:—

(1) The patient feels ill, complains of headache, and on taking the temperature it is found to be 102° F.—104° F. She will have all the signs of fever, that is, listlessness, a general feeling of malaise, thirst, hot dry skin, furred tongue, dry lips, and a flushed appearance.

The temperature is not ushered in with a rigor, but usually rises gradually.

The pulse rate is increased, and may be 100—120.

(2) On abdominal examination, the uterus is found to be tender and large and sub-involuted, due to the presence of retained portions of placenta or membrane, or a clot. These may be expelled on kneading the uterus.

(3) On removing the pad, the discharges, called lochia, are found to have an offensive smell, and are red in colour, may be free and excessive, or in severe cases suppressed altogether.

(4) Other conditions present are:—(1) Offensive stools, and (2) rashes resembling those of scarlet fever or measles. If sapræmia is diagnosed in time, treatment will be successful; if not, septicæmia may result, possibly on account of the fact that successive generations

of saprophytes may produce an organism that can live on living tissue.

THE ONSET OF SEPTICÆMIA IN A LYING-IN WOMAN.

Septicæmia is a condition of septic infection, due to micro-organisms, streptococci, feeding on living tissue, *i.e.*, blood.

The condition necessary is the presence of the streptococci, which are introduced into the blood stream, either through the dirty hands of the attendant, dirty instruments, or dirty bedding and clothing of the patient.

The onset of septicæmia may occur shortly after the delivery of the child, but it usually commences on the third day after delivery.

The signs are rigors, a rigor being a shivering fit, with chattering of the teeth, the patient feels cold, and on taking the temperature it is found to be high, 104° F.—106° F. The pulse rate is rapid, and in severe cases weak.

The appearance of the patient is flushed, and she may tell you that she feels quite well.

In a mild form of septicæmia, the lochia are not offensive, and may be suppressed. On abdominal examination the uterus is found to be normal, and there is no abdominal pain, tenderness, and swelling.

Some of the signs of fever may be present, that is, the patient complains of headache, has a furred tongue, dry skin, with septic rash, and is restless and complains of sleeplessness.

In the severe cases of septicæmia, the patient has repeated rigors, high temperature, which may drop subnormally, the pulse rate becoming rapid and feeble, and she may be delirious.

Other signs present are severe headache and vomiting, the vomit being coffee ground in appearance. The patient may be constipated, but this condition may be followed by diarrhoea.

The abdomen becomes distended, and painful, and tender. The skin is dry, and septic rashes and jaundice may set in.

If the temperature remains subnormal and the pulse rapid, the prognosis is bad. The patient may die on the fifth or sixth day.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss J. G. Gilchrist, Miss S. Simpson, Mrs. E. E. Farthing, Miss M. M. G. Bielby, Miss L. Bullivant, Miss J. Macpherson, Miss F. Thompson, Miss M. James, Miss Dora Vine.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

Mention the animal parasites which may be found on the surface of the body. Explain what methods you would adopt for their removal.

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