

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL EMETICS, AND IN WHAT CASES ARE THEY USED?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss A. M. Douglas, University College Hospital, Gower Street, W.C.1.

PRIZE PAPER.

An emetic is an agent which causes vomiting. The word is derived from a Greek verb meaning "to provoke sickness." Emetics fall into two groups: those which act by irritating the mucous membrane of the stomach, and those which affect the portion of the brain which controls the act of vomiting. To the first group belong sulphate of zinc, sulphate of copper, mustard and water, salt and water, alum, and salvolatile; to the second, ipecacuanha, apomorphine, potassio-tartrate of antimony, tickling of the throat, and evil smells.

The use of an emetic is to clear the stomach and œsophagus of irritating or poisonous substances.

If an irritant poison, such as false mushrooms, lucifer matches (in this case no oil must ever be given as it dissolves the phosphorous and aids its absorption), or rat poison has been taken, an emetic that acts quickly should be given. Salt and water (one tablespoonful to a tumbler of warm water), or mustard and water (two teaspoonfuls in a tumbler of water), are almost always at hand. But sulphate of zinc (grs. xx.) or sulphate of copper (grs. x.), if obtainable, is more effectual. Salvolatile (one tablespoonful in water) is useful when the heart is weak, as it also acts as a stimulant. Tickling the throat with a feather may also be resorted to.

If a narcotic poison has been taken the same measures can be used, but in the case of all corrosive irritants, such as nitric or hydrochloric acid, except carbolic acid, no emetic should be given. The same rule applies to alkaline poisons.

In cases such as bronchitis or croup, when the secretions accumulate in the air passages, and are not properly expelled by coughing, but are often swallowed, an emetic is administered in small quantities to clear the passages. Ipecacuanha is generally used; it is the root of a Brazilian shrub, and contains a substance called emetone, which irritates the mucous membrane; it also acts on the vomiting centre of the brain after being absorbed into the blood. Large doses are necessary to produce vomiting: $\mathfrak{z}\text{i}$ may be given to a child of a year old, $\mathfrak{z}\text{i}$ to an adult. It acts slowly and is

therefore not advisable if an immediate result is required.

Apomorphine, a prompt emetic, is usually given hypodermically (dose $\frac{1}{10}$ gr.). It can be used in cases when it is difficult to get the patient to swallow.

Various diseases, such as peritonitis, gallstone, or renal colic, obstruction of the bowels; or states such as pregnancy, sudden fright, or interference with the balancing centre, as in sea-sickness, may cause vomiting owing to their derangement of the cerebral system.

When an emetic is administered the nurse should always have a receiver at hand in case of speedy result, and not wait until after it has been given to fetch one. A glass of water should be given to the patient to rinse his mouth with afterwards. Sometimes the patient likes the nurse to hold his head as the pressure seems to aid the act of vomiting. The vomited matter must be covered and kept for the doctor's inspection.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss Minnie Penman, Miss Winifred M. Appleton, Mrs. Farthing, Miss P. Thomson, Miss J. Robinson, Miss Henrietta T. Inglis.

Mrs. Farthing writes:—

"If an emetic has to be given it should be given at once, as the case will be urgent.

In cases of croup, ipecacuanha wine, one teaspoonful in water, or if an older child, if the case is severe, two teaspoonfuls may be given, and repeated in a quarter of an hour if the child does not vomit.

Give an emetic in all cases of poisoning, except where corrosive poisons have been taken; this being the case the stomach will be burnt and injured and the strain of vomiting may tear through the walls of the stomach at a weakened spot and this will be fatal.

An emetic must not be given whilst the patient is unconscious, as both in swallowing it and in the subsequent vomiting, the fluids are liable to pass into the air passages and suffocate him, or her, as the case may be."

We regret that the paper by Miss H. T. Inglis was not received in time to compete for the prize.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

What is meant by "descent of the cord," and what complications and difficulties does this create?

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