

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT IS A COUNTER IRRITANT? NAME ANY THAT YOU KNOW, AND THE METHOD OF THEIR APPLICATION.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this month to Miss Phoebe Gill, S.R.N., Royal Free Hospital, London, W.C.1.

PRIZE PAPER.

A counter irritant is an agent which produces a superficial irritation. It is used to counteract some deep inflammation. Various forms of counter irritants are in use, the chief being:—

I.—RUBEFIACENTS, CAUSING REDDENING OF SKIN.

(a) *Fomentations*.—These are best made of a material that holds heat well, *i.e.*, gamgee tissue, which, cut to the required size, is made hot by boiling in a wringer, wrung out, quickly shaken to let steam escape, applied to the desired area and covered with jaconet and a brown wool pad and bandaged. They should be renewed at least hourly and, when discontinued, the wool pad should be left over the reddened area.

(b) *Stupes*.—For this purpose a turpentine stupe is used. The material required is a double thickness of thick soft flannel, 1-3 dms. of turpentine and boiling water. Sprinkle the turpentine evenly over the flannel, pour over 1 pint of boiling water, wring out and apply as directed for fomentations. Watch carefully for reddening of the skin and remove the stupe when this occurs, leaving the wool pad over the area.

(c) *Poultices*.—Linseed meal is the most useful medium for making poultices, but even with the greatest care and speed it tends quickly to become a sticky, warm application. Before beginning to mix, everything required should be heated, the quantity of boiling water required is poured into a hot basin, and the meal quickly stirred in until it leaves the sides of the basin clean; it is then spread on a piece of old linen or on a layer of teased tow, the edges turned in neatly and applied at once. It is covered and fixed as a fomentation. Mustard may be added, amount one-tenth to one-sixth as much as linseed used. This poultice must be removed as soon as the skin is reddened, the area left covered with the brown wool pad. If the skin is tender, olive oil should be applied.

2.—IODINE APPLICATION.

Tinct. Iodi. Fortis is painted on with a brush; it should be applied with care, two coats only over the required area; it must be allowed to dry before being covered with a dry wool pad. Severe burns may be caused by over application, covering when wet, or covering with a wet dressing.

3.—MUSTARD LEAF.

Take off the paper cover, dip the leaf in warm water, allow to drip and apply. Cover with a wool pad. Remove the leaf as soon as the skin is reddened, leaving the wool pad over the area.

4.—EPISPASTICS.

(a) *Emplastrum Cantharidini*.—Ordered usually about $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch in diameter. This is loosely fixed with strips of $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch plaster, allowing room for the blister to form. When ready, the blister is snipped, the fluid

caught on a swab, and a spread ointment dressing applied.

(b) *Liquor Epispasticus* may be painted over a prescribed area the same size as above, the area being surrounded by vaseline, a spread ointment dressing lightly fixed over it and when the blister is formed treatment is as above. The skin area in each case must be surgically clean. The drug is contra-indicated in cases of kidney disease.

5.—CUPPING.

Cups of glass or metal in which a vacuum is created are applied firmly until the surface flesh is drawn up to fill the vacuum and becomes a very congested area. Biers cups, having a rubber bulb for suction purposes, are most often used. Plain glass cups are wiped round inside with a little spirit (not enough to drip) and applied at once, the suction is caused by loss of air. The rims of all cups must be smeared with vaseline. To remove, press down the flesh outside to admit air; do not pull the cup.

6.—LEECHES.

In applying leeches the nurse must remember that most patients object to them; they should be kept out of sight. The area must be cleaned with hot water and briskly rubbed dry to slightly redden the skin, it is then covered with a piece of lint in which holes for the number of leeches to be applied have been cut. The leeches' heads are held to these holes and when they are fixed they may be lightly covered over. They will drop off in about 20 minutes, and must never be pulled off; if required, a little salt on their heads will loosen them. Patients must not be left when leeches are in use and the body of the leech must never lie on the patient's skin.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss E. A. Noblett, S.R.N., Miss J. G. Gilchrist, R.G.N., Miss E. M. Robertson, R.G.N. Miss Lucy C. Cooper, S.R.N., and Miss Daisy E. Lee, S.R.N.

Miss Gilchrist writes:—"The word 'counter' is derived from the Latin '*contra*,' against, or in opposition to; as in the term counter-plot, a plot opposed to another in order to frustrate.

In nursing and medical work a counter-irritant is a substance used to produce a secondary irritable condition in order to relieve or counter a primary one.

Irritation suggests inflammation, with its associated congestive condition, therefore the action of a counter-irritant is directed to the relief of pain and inflammation, by producing an irritation of the sensory nerve endings lying underneath the surface, causing an increased flow of blood to the area of application, thereby relieving the inner primary state.

The intensity of this action varies with the agent used. In simple cases an inflammatory condition may be relieved by the reflex action of simple heat or cold; in other cases, when there may be deep-seated pain, more strenuous action is called for."

QUESTION FOR NEXT MONTH.

Describe the special diets given to patients suffering from the following diseases:—(a) Tuberculosis, (b) Nephritis, (c) Diabetes, (d) Rickets.

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