

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT IS CELLULITIS? DESCRIBE SOME FORMS OF TREATMENT YOU WOULD EXPECT TO BE USED FOR CELLULITIS OF THE ARM.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this month to Miss Winifred Moss, County Hospital, Bedford.

PRIZE PAPER.

Cellulitis is inflammation of the soft structures, or cellular tissues, beneath the skin, including the muscles and their coverings. It is usually due to infection with pyogenic organisms, occurring through a wound in the skin. The affected area is red, swollen, shiny, painful, throbbing and tender, and the local lymphatic glands are also inflamed and enlarged, and there are severe constitutional disturbances.

Cellulitis may arise in any of the subcutaneous tissues; it may be complicated by the formation of abscesses and in severe cases by the production of septicaemia.

In the case of cellulitis of the arm multiple incisions are usually made in the affected tissues by the surgeon, thus relieving the tension and effecting free drainage. If, however, the pus is not sufficiently localised for immediate incision, the arm is kept at rest and a supply of healthy blood to it is increased by means of heat, such as by large fomentations, and hot arm baths, and by Bier's treatment.

Hot arm baths are given in special trough-shaped baths, half-filled with water at 100° F., and an antiseptic lotion such as Lysol 1%, Tr. Iodine 3i.—Oii., Eusol or Normal Saline added. The bath is carefully arranged on the bed with sandbags or pillows so that it causes no discomfort and cannot be easily overturned. The arm is then laid in it and the bath covered to prevent cooling. A small pad should be placed between the edge of the bath and the limb, and the water should be kept at the same temperature. There should be as little movement of the injured arm as possible.

Bier's treatment aims at using the passive congestion that results from obstruction of veins, in the place of the active hyperaemia which is nature's cure. A soft broad rubber bandage is bound round the limb at the proximal side of the lesion, sufficiently tightly to make the part below bluish-red and swollen, but not cyanotic. The pulse of the limb must not be affected. A short application of half an hour is usually sufficient at first, and later this period may be extended considerably, even to twenty hours. The affected tissues become flooded with serum which has a beneficial effect in combating the infection present. Small incisions only may be necessary under this treatment and the duration of the condition shortened.

Once the tension is relieved and free drainage established the treatment is both local and general.

The wound must be frequently dressed, all sinuses kept open until the inflammation has subsided, and a careful watch kept for any increase of redness or swelling indicating further formation of pus. Drainage is encouraged by the application of heat in the form of baths and fomentations, or Bier's treatment may be applied.

Antistreptococcal serum may be ordered, and vaccines if the condition persists and is slow in clearing up.

Serum is given intramuscularly with all aseptic precautions. Rest is essential, the arm being moved as little as possible and carried in a sling.

The general treatment consists of maintaining the patient's strength and treating any condition which may arise.

The excretory organs should be kept active by the administration of saline purgatives to empty the bowels; and diuretics to promote a healthy action of the kidneys. The skin and pressure points must receive attention, the mouth cleansed and the importance of giving plenty of fluids to drink emphasised. They hasten the elimination of the toxins and so lessen the tendency to delirium and headache. Insomnia may be present, and often a sponging or a warm drink may prevent the need for drugs. If due to pain a sedative may be ordered, the dressing being done first and the fomentation renewed to ascertain that drainage is being maintained.

The diet, if the fever is high, should be fluid, nourishing and easily digested to combat to some extent the tissue waste. Milk should form its basis, varied with fluid preparations of meat. This should be increased steadily to an ordinary diet as the fever subsides and the patient's condition improves. Stimulants may be ordered and are especially helpful in old and debilitated people.

Fresh air and sunshine are aids to recovery, and when his condition allows the patient is encouraged to get up and out in the fresh air, the arm being rested in a sling.

Thus we see that cellulitis of the arm may have far-reaching effects, the pus spreading rapidly. The various forms of treatment aim at increasing the resistance of the body to the infection and at helping it to eliminate the poisons as speedily as possible.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

A good paper was sent by Miss J. M. Dunbar, Coatbridge, but as it did not conform to the conditions of the competition as to the number of words, it was ineligible for the prize.

Miss Dunbar writes: "Cellulitis is an acute inflammation of cellular tissues under skin, usually involving a large area. Very often there is the formation of pus.

"When temperature and pulse rate continue to rise, the arm keeps painful and the affected part is 'boggy' to touch, the presence of pus is indicated. The patient is prepared for an anaesthetic in the ordinary way. An incision is made and the pus evacuated. The cavity is lightly scraped and swabbed out with some antiseptic, such as flavine or iodine, then packed with gauze. A counter-incision may be necessary to ensure free drainage. The wound is dressed once or twice daily as required. The arm is often put into a 'bath' containing eusol or boracic once or twice daily. The hot solution helps to reduce inflammation and free sloughs. A band of iodine (Tr. iodine 5% and strong solution mixed) about 2 in. wide is sometimes painted round arm. Great care must be taken to keep the iodine well beyond inflamed part. This sometimes prevents the cellulitis spreading."

QUESTION FOR NEXT MONTH.

What is the cause of Eclampsia? Describe the nursing of such a case.

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