

Bleeding Time.

The Technique and Fallacies of this Test.

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A DETERMINATION of the bleeding time is one of the tests which often proves of great value in the investigation of a patient suffering from a haemorrhagic or purpuric type of disease. The test is from its nature essentially a ward test carried out at the bedside of the patient—extremely simple to do, but like all easy measures full of pitfalls ready to trap the unwary. While a determination of the individual's bleeding time is not the only test available, in point of fact there is a whole battery of tests which may be employed. The point is that, with one exception, the other tests are measures which are best carried out in the laboratory, rather than at the bedside of the patient, or in the ward test room. It is true that in the investigation of these conditions the physician is unlikely to employ only the bleeding test; he will almost for a certainty regard as essential such tests as a blood platelet count, a determination of the time taken by the blood to coagulate, probably also the capillary fragility test of Hess. This is the one exception which is made at the patient's bedside. In addition, he may have a clot retraction test—that is, the time taken by the blood clot to completely retract.

There are a number of methods available for the determination of the bleeding time. In principle they are all the same; a small puncture is made in the lobe of the ear, a finger or the forearm, and the bleeding time is the time taken for bleeding to cease. In this country the method most commonly employed is that of Duke's. In this technique the lobe of the ear is used as a puncture site.

Duke's Method.

In common with all other methods, it is absolutely essential that as far as possible the technique and conditions of the test should be standardised. Quite a number of extraneous factors can influence the end point of bleeding, and unless very careful precautions are taken, false results are liable to occur. While the test is very simple to do and, unless the bleeding time is prolonged, rarely takes many minutes, undue haste in its performance is to be avoided. It is better to wait until one is in a position to give the attention this important procedure needs. The nature and depth of the puncture made, the temperature of the ward, the manner in which the clot or blob of blood is touched to determine if bleeding has ceased are all factors which can have marked influence on the result obtained. To a large extent these are all factors which are under the control of the operator and it is essential that they should be standardised—that is to say, carried out in the correct way every time the test is made. In Duke's method the puncture site is the lobe of the ear, which should be warm. As it is undesirable that the ear should be moved during the test, the patient should be told that the test is almost completely painless; just the one puncture in the lobe. In this way his full co-operation is usually obtained. Before the puncture is made the lobe is, of course, first cleaned up with spirit or ether. Care must, however, be taken to leave the ear dry. The puncture instrument is a straight-sided needle of the surgical type and a single wound only made. It is usual to select the bottom of the lobe—that is, puncture upwards. In this way the lobe may be steadied between the finger and thumb while the puncture is made. The puncture

wound should be reasonably deep and only one puncture made. If the ear is cold it must be warmed before the test is made. After the puncture has been made, no pressure should be applied to the area; in fact, the actual area of the test must not be touched. At half-minute intervals a piece of filter or blotting paper is applied to the edge of the drop of blood which comes from the small wound. This is the critical part of the test and it is essential that the blotting paper should not actually touch the skin, or the bleeding time may be unduly prolonged. The timing is best controlled by means of a stop watch, if such a piece of apparatus is available; failing this the second hand of a watch is quite satisfactory. When the blotting paper is first applied quite a large drop of blood will be drawn off. This will decrease in size with each application until no more is obtained. This is the end point and the time taken is the patient's bleeding time. With Duke's method the normal bleeding time is from 2-5 minutes, increased time is anything outside of this range, though borderline increases should be taken with reservation and should certainly be confirmed by a further test. In cases with markedly increased time, it may be as much as 30 minutes or in exceptional cases even more.

British Council Courses for 1949.

SOME interesting new ventures in short courses in the United Kingdom arranged by the British Council for specialists from overseas are announced in the Council's 1949 programme, which gives details of some 40 courses to be held in the provinces, Scotland and Wales between February and October in which more than 1,000 visitors to this country are expected to take part.

This programme, copies of which have been distributed in some 44 countries in all parts of the world, invites applications for the courses, the length of which is from two to three weeks, and which cost from £16 to £28 inclusive of everything except fares to and from the United Kingdom.

Courses of proved popularity on English language and literature and various aspects of present-day Britain, including education, local government and the social services, will be repeated again this year. That the number of teachers' courses is double that for 1948 provides some indication of their success.

The programme for the course on "The Nursing Profession" to be held in Edinburgh will include visits to hospitals, institutes and nurses' homes as well as a variety of lectures on such subjects as the training of nurses; nursing as a career; nursing associations; occupational therapy; midwifery; general, specialised and district nursing; and nursing services in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Some of the more general courses will include lectures on British Hospitals and Public Health Services, the Prevention and Treatment of Industrial Diseases, and the National Insurance and Assistance Acts.

An Important Meeting.

AN Extraordinary Meeting of the Grand Council of the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has been summoned to take place on Friday, February 25th, 1949, in the Nurses' Home at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London, W.C. Important matters are due for consideration; we hope wise counsel will prevail.

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