

Letters to the Editor

The first recorded case of diabetic pregnancy (Bennewitz HG, 1824, University of Berlin)

Dear Sir,

An English translation of the thesis in Latin by Dr. H. G. Bennewitz, found at the Bayrische Staatsbibliothek, Ludwigstrasse 16, D-8000 München 22, FRG, has been deposited in the Library of the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, London. This is the first recorded case of pregnancy in a diabetic mother. We give a brief synopsis of the thesis here.

The patient in question was a 22-year-old Berlin housewife. The first symptoms were during her fourth pregnancy when she began to feel a great need to drink. Following the pregnancy she avoided medical help thinking that she was cured. However, during her fifth pregnancy the symptoms returned even more severely. She had "a really unquenchable thirst, as she burned up in excruciating agony her throat could not be calmed by any drink so that within the space of one day she easily consumed more than six Berlin measures of beer or spring water". "The urine she passed was rain-coloured and cloudy, and smelt stale just like stale beer". "... sixteen pounds of urine held no less than two ounces of sugar substance, not unlike flour-sugar".

"Then, as the woman was safely approaching her time on December 29, 1823 the fetus suddenly, unexpectedly sent early signs of its arrival - the head of the child (which had begun to move) pushing out around two o'clock in the afternoon. These signs may have come on their own accord or by the untimely help of the obstetrician. The child's head stuck out like a wedge and its shoulders stuck in the womb exit - moving neither up nor down. In the end he was born dead, but not without a great struggle".

"The child indeed, whom you would have thought Hercules had begotten, was of such robust and healthy character, and such a weight that he weighed twelve civil pounds and the celebrated Osann and the patient herself are my witnesses in case you think I'm concocting fa-

bles. His shoulders were of such width that I could not span their circumference even with my fingers spread out".

After the birth, the patient was sent home thus, "At last, once we had observed the patient do without therapeutic treatment for a good while, and saw that she had no longer any pain, we ordered her to keep to the meat diet we had prescribed and in order for her to be able to buy it we gave her eight weeks meat money. With nature to preserve and treat her, we dismissed our patient cured".

Copies of the full thesis (approximately 8000 words) can be obtained from the Librarian, the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1, UK. The translation of the thesis was made at the Queen's University of Belfast.

Yours sincerely,

D. R. Hadden and B. Hillebrand

References

Hadden DR (1989) The development of diabetes and its relation to pregnancy - the long-term and short-term historical viewpoint. In: Sutherland HW, Stowers JM (eds) Carbohydrate metabolism in pregnancy and the newborn. Proceedings of the 4th Aberdeen Colloquium (in press)

Matthews Duncan J (1982) On puerperal diabetes. Trans Obstet Soc Lond 24: 256-285

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Announcements

Update on Diabetes in Childhood

The International Study Group on Diabetes in Children and Adolescents (ISGD) announces a course on "Update on Diabetes in Childhood", March 17-24, 1990 to be held in Malga Ciapela, Marmolada, Italy.

The course is addressed to paediatricians, practitioners and endocrinologists dealing with children and adolescents. Directors of the course are Dr. L. Pinelli, University of Verona, Italy, and Prof. Z. Laron, Tel Aviv University, Israel.

The scientific programme will be held in the mornings and evenings, and during the day winter sports can be enjoyed in a beautiful area of the Alps at a height of up to 3000 meters.

For further information and a detailed programme, please write to: Dr. L. Pinelli, Servizio di Diabetologia Pediatrica Policlinico, I-37134 Verona, Italy, Tel. 0039-45-933667, Fax. 0039-45-508222.

The **Juvenile Diabetes Foundation International** is now accepting applications from investigators working anywhere in the world to the following JDFI grant-in-aid programmes:

1. Postdoctoral Fellowships; 2. Career Development Awards; 3. New Training for Established Scientists Grants; 4. JDFI Summer Student Research Programmes.

Deadline for all of these grants: October 1, 1989 with the exception of the Summer Student Programme which has a deadline of October 15, 1989.

Applications may be obtained from: Grant Administrator, Juvenile Diabetes Foundation International, 432 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016, USA. Tel.: (212) 889 7575