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CONTACT THE MJA

AMPCo House, 277 Clarence Street, Sydney,
NSW 2000. ABN 20 000 005 854.
Post: The MJA, Locked Bag 3030, Strawberry Hills,
NSW 2012. Tel: (02) 9562 6666. Fax: (02) 9562 6699.
mja@mja.com.au

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS: <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/mja-instructions-authors>

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Advertising Coordinator Susantika Susantika
Tel: (02) 9562 6621.
advertising@mja.com.au, reprints@mja.com.au

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Tel: (02) 9562 6617. subscriptions@mja.com.au
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Highlights from our archives



Although the first diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis combination vaccine was developed in the United States in 1942, it was not used widely in Australia until 1953. This advertisement for the standard whooping cough treatment, atropine methonitrate, appeared in the 16 January 1954 issue.

The treatment of acute poliomyelitis

In 1954, Australia was at the end of a terrible polio epidemic. At its peak it struck 10 000 people a year. Jonas Salk had developed his vaccine in 1953 but it would be another 2–3 years before the vaccine was in use here.

Sir: May I congratulate Dr Gordon Colvin and Dr SEJ Robertson on their excellent articles on acute poliomyelitis? Might I have space to comment on, and stress certain points?

- The extreme danger of “working off the sluggish feeling of the early stages”, as Dr Colvin puts it. Practically all paralysis would be avoided if we could diagnose the disease at this stage.
- In the first 2 to 3 weeks after the onset of meningitic symptoms, all active muscular movement should not be avoided but forbidden, and the patient not allowed to lift even a finger to do anything for himself.

- Passive movements at any time — no active movement before 4 weeks, and then only very little before 6 weeks, and then increasing as rapidly as possible.
- Dr Robertson says “pain can be relieved by aspirin or codeine”. Mental distress, excitement, insomnia and intense pain are almost unbearable. Aspirin and codeine are useless alone. In addition, give morphia, phenobarbital, potassium bromide, chloral, carbital, or all if necessary, and they may be needed for 6 weeks. Nothing is so demoralising as pain and/or lack of sleep. Is the modern young doctor afraid of drugs, other than antibiotics?

AM MacIntosh, Cronulla, NSW
27 February 1954

Junk mail from drug firms

Sir: The spate of advertising literature descending upon the practitioner each morning has long since surpassed his requirements both of blotting paper and of information, and in fact has become a burden.

More serious are two other aspects: firstly wastage of the economy in the production and marketing of millions of tablets of doubtful value, and secondly, the filching of trade by small organisations from

the older well established firms. It seems to me a matter of urgency that a check should be put at once to the formation of new drug firms in Australia.

CRR Huxtable, Roseville, NSW
14 December 1953