Correspondence

Duodenal ulcers that will not heal

SIR,—In the July 1984 issue of Gut Dr R E Pounder asks why a small but troublesome proportion of duodenal ulcers will not heal despite a medical regimen that produces complete healing in the majority of patients. This is the oft and long heard plaint of intractability, and it is rightly raised again.

That certain ulcers defy suppression of gastric acid secretion seems to be a violation of Schwartz’s dictum: ‘no acid, no ulcer’. As with most dicta, there are variances and exceptions to the rule. Moreover, as most observers would agree, there is more to the pathogenesis of duodenal ulcer than merely an exposure to acid secretion, as important as that may be. Many duodenal ulcers heal in the presence of acid, and on the other hand it should not be surprising that some ulcers fail to heal when acid secretion is diminished. When one seeks an explanation of intractability, one does well to look beyond the acid milieu of the stomach.

I am loath to cite old references, but I submit that an explanation of intractability has been found in the pathologic anatomy of certain duodenal ulcers, namely, confined perforation. Also, it has been shown that this complication bears no relation to the potency of gastric acid secretion. Ulcers that have penetrated deeply into adjacent structures, thereby inciting a dense inflammatory and cicatricial response to injury, are notably resistant to otherwise effective medical therapy and usually require a surgical remedy.

Analogous to the Biblical ‘poor’, it seems that the intractable ulcer will always be with us, even if in diminished numbers and for reasons other than gastric acid secretion.

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References

Books received


News

Pancreatic Disease 1985
Second symposium on the investigation and management of pancreatic disease will be held on 11 and 12 April 1985 in the Clinical Sciences Building at St James’s University Hospital, Leeds. Further particulars may be obtained from Mrs E M Tasker, Department of Medicine, Clinical Sciences Building, St James’s University Hospital, Leeds LS9 7TF. Telephone 0532 433144, ext 5256.

European Nuclear Medicine Congress 1985
This congress will be held at the Barbican Hall in London from 3–6 September 1985. Further details from the Congress Secretariat, European Nuclear Medicine Congress 1985, Institute of Nuclear Medicine, Middlesex Hospital Medical School, Mortimer St, London W1N 8AA. Telephone 01-631 1066.