Introduction

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IN the more developed countries between 1.6% and 4% of all pregnancies still result in perinatal death and in some of these countries deaths during the perinatal period outnumber those of persons up to 30–40 years of age (WHO 1977).

Infections of one kind or another before, during and soon after birth contribute significantly to perinatal morbidity and mortality. In the U.K. the situation is not as good as that of other countries of Western Europe, where improvement in recent years has been greater (Medical News, 1976). It was particularly opportune, therefore, that the subject chosen for the 1976 Annual Symposium of the British Society for the Study of Infection was Perinatal Infection.

With an increasing trend towards specialization in health care, the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of infection in newly-born infants has become the responsibility of doctors and other health workers from many specialities. Included among these are general practitioners, community physicians, obstetricians, paediatricians, infectious disease physicians and microbiologists as well as midwives, infection control nurses, health visitors and other members of the nursing profession.

Perinatal infection covers a wide field, and time available for the symposium necessitated selection of topics for presentation and discussion. In making its choice of subjects and speakers the organizing committee chose to include those subjects of particular importance, in some instances because of recent advances in knowledge and in others because unsolved problems were judged to merit special consideration.

Microbial disease at any age results from the interaction of host and parasite. In recent years a good deal more has been learned about host defence mechanisms, what they are, how they develop, how they interact to provide protection and most importantly how they may fail to protect. It is therefore appropriate that the first topic considered in these proceedings deals with immunological aspects of neonatal infection. Following this comes a very practical discourse on preventing infection in nurseries for the newly born. The remainder of the proceedings deals more specifically with infection caused by particular microbes, some of them bacteria, some viruses and one a protozoan parasite.

It is to be hoped that these proceedings will be read by all whose work contributes to the prevention and cure of perinatal infections so that in this and other countries a much to be desired improvement in perinatal morbidity and mortality may be achieved.

Thanks are due to all those who participated in the symposium and who have made their contributions available for publication in this special number of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal*.

Dr J. M. Medlock, Honorary Secretary of the British Society for the Study of Infection, deserves special mention for again making all the arrangements for a most successful event and for editing the papers for publication.

References

- MEDICAL NEWS (1976) Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report. *British Medical Journal*, 2, 886.
- WHO (1977) Attempts to improve the prospects of survival of newborn infants. *WHO Chronicle*, 31, 66.