

deficient. At our own institution videotaping is common and is quite a valuable teaching device for ourselves. But some of the resistance mentioned above and in Dr Maguire's comments also occurs.

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#### PUERPERAL AFFECTIVE DISORDERS AND RESPONSE TO LITHIUM

DEAR SIR,

We read with interest the report by Katona (*Journal*, 1982, 141, 447-52) comparing puerperal and non-puerperal psychiatric illness and noted the high preponderance of affective illness in the puerperal sample. We were however surprised to observe that lithium was used less often in puerperal than in non-puerperal manic disorder.

For many years we have used lithium in the prophylaxis of recurrent affective disorders. Among our patients, 24 had puerperal affective illness and 19 of these patients had their first affective episode post partum. This group was compared with a group of multiparous non-puerperal affectively ill patients in terms of clinical variables and response to lithium over one year. There was no differences between puerperal and non-puerperal patients in age, prevalence of

family history of affective disorder, number of episodes prior to starting lithium and time on lithium prophylaxis.

Bipolar and unipolar puerperal patients had significantly lower mean age of onset than corresponding non-puerperal patients (see Table). Response to lithium was measured by an affective morbidity index (Coppen *et al*, 1973). Bipolar and unipolar puerperal patients had a similar response to lithium to corresponding non-puerperal patients.

First year response to lithium was shown to be a powerful predictor of long-term response. (Abou-Saleh and Coppen, unpublished observation).

The recurrence rate of puerperal affective illness in the present series was 57 per cent in bipolar and 53 per cent in unipolar puerperal patients.

These findings show the high morbidity of puerperal affective disorders and strongly suggest the need for lithium prophylaxis in these disorders.

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#### Reference

COPPEN, A., PECT, M., BAILEY, J., NOGUERA, R., BURNS, B. H., SWANI, M. S., MAGGS, R., & GARDNER R. (1973) Double-blind and open prospective studies of lithium prophylaxis in affective disorders. *Psychiatrica, Neurologica, Neurochirurgica (Amst.)*, 76, 501-10.

TABLE

*Comparison of puerperal and non-puerperal affectively ill patients (results expressed as mean  $\pm$  S.E.)*

Group	N	Age (Yrs)	Age of onset (Yrs)	Affective morbidity index
Puerperal bipolar	7	57.1 $\pm$ 2.7	24.8* $\pm$ 2.3	0.14 $\pm$ 0.08
Non-puerperal bipolar	5	63.2 $\pm$ 2.7	39.2 $\pm$ 2.9	0.11 $\pm$ 0.05
Puerperal unipolar	17	54.2 $\pm$ 2.8	29.5** $\pm$ 2.3	0.19 $\pm$ 0.05
Non-puerperal unipolar	25	60.5 $\pm$ 2.1	46.2 $\pm$ 2.4	0.19 $\pm$ 0.08

\* Significantly lower than non-puerperal bipolars P <0.01

\*\* Significantly lower than non-puerperal unipolars P <0.001