

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

St. Bartholomew's Hospital,  
London, E.C.1,  
January 28, 1962.

SIR:

The letter by Doctor Michael Johnstone (September, 1961, p. 520) contains the remark "Despite Dobkin's arguments . . . chloroform remains virulently hepatotoxic."

I do not think that this statement should remain unchallenged as, with all respect to Dr. Johnstone, I believe it to be untrue. This belief is founded on my own experience of some 5,000 cases in the early 1920's, on my observations of usual hospital practice at that time, and more importantly, on the painstaking researches of the Wisconsin team headed by Dr. Ralph Waters and published in 1951. It may be recalled that 121 patients undergoing all kinds of major surgery were studied, 65 of whom were anaesthetized with chloroform and 56 with various other agents. Five different tests of hepatic function were carried out on each patient pre-operatively and at intervals after operation. Hepatic dysfunction of detectable degree was noted in 52 per cent of patients who had received chloroform and in 44 per cent of the control group. Abnormal results were transitory. Waters remarks that "the differences in the results between the two groups were not nearly as striking as we and many others would have anticipated."

After some experience with halothane I (and others) was struck by its great similarity to chloroform, the chief difference being that it is about sixty-six times as expensive. I would think that if chloroform were given with oxygen in an accurate vaporizer, such as the Chlorotec, there would be little difference from halothane in results.

C. LANGTON HEWER