Letters to the Editor

Concentration of Testosterone Glucuronide in Urine from Women with Breast Tumours. M. K. JONES, I. D. RAMSAY and W. P. COLLINS Br. J. Cancer (1977) 36, 818.

SIR,—In a high proportion of women with benign breast disease the androgenic activity is abnormal and the premenstrual endometrium hyperplastic (R. Grattarola, Senologia (1977) 2, 19). As the result of this study I suggested that abnormal androgenicity might be the hormonal condition for converting a benign to a malignant breast disease; so I am not surprised when the authors of this paper claim that there is no difference in the concentration of the testosterone glucuronide from patients with benign or malignant breast disease. What surprises me is their conclusion; that their results, which come from two groups of women with either benign or malignant tumours of the breast, do not concur with my results, which showed that in women with breast cancer and hyperplastic endometrial pattern, the amount of testosterone excreted is above that of women whose breast was free from any disease, as ascertained by clinical and mammographic examinations, and whose endometrial pattern was normal.

The comparison made in this study is clearly quite different from mine and consequently the conclusions must be different too.

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SIR.—Dr Grattarola’s hypothesis is that androgens play an important part in the development and progression of breast cancer; to investigate this he has determined the concentration of urinary testosterone glucuronide by gas-chromatography in groups of women with breast cancer, and found it abnormal. In the study referred to in his letter he claims androgenic activity is also abnormal in benign disease, and suggests that this stimulus is responsible for converting benign disease to malignant. I cannot support this conclusion. We measured testosterone glucuronide by radioimmunoassay in patients with benign and malignant disease of the breast. The results show that the concentrations were not significantly different; in addition all the values were within the accepted normal laboratory range for this technique.

Stress is known to effect the excretion of urinary steroid metabolites. I consider the control group of similarly hospitalized women with benign breast disease to be particularly appropriate.

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