

numbers alone can be dangerously misleading. An uncritical observer, influenced by favorable reports from the animal laboratory, may reach overly optimistic conclusions about the efficacy of a new drug in man, conclusions seemingly substantiated in large numbers of patients. With suitable experimental design, reliable measurements and adequate controls, the discerning worker would have been able to recognize the shortcomings of the drug early in the study. In other words, the numbers themselves, large or small, are blameless, provided the methodology is strict in design. Indeed, large series may then be highly informative.

The most recent demonstration of the pitfalls because of failure to appreciate species differences concerns the so-called ultrashort acting barbiturate methitural (Neraval). Careful work by Blake and Perlman (*J. Pharmacol. & Exper. Therap.* 117: 287, 1956) showed that in dogs and rats methitural is localized in fat and metabolized by the liver considerably more rapidly than is thiopental. Unfortunately these findings do not carry over to man, despite enthusiastic claims to the contrary based upon early clinical trials. Gale (*ANESTHESIOLOGY* 18: 573 1957) collected quantitative data showing that in man there is no important difference between methitural and other thiobarbiturates in clinical use. The ideal intravenous anesthetic remains to be found.

The postman, the peddler and the pharmacologist have learned to heed the warning, "*cave canem.*" The anesthesiologist can profit by their example.

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TWELFTH POSTGRADUATE ASSEMBLY

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