

Evans & Seely (1984) have reported pseudocyesis in a male who, like our patient, had a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder.

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Reference

EVANS, D. L. & SEELY, T. J. (1984) Pseudocyesis in the male. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, **172**, 37–40.

CORRIGENDUM

Journal, June 1989, **154**, 754–767 (L. Eisenberg). In the footnote on p. 754, 'and *Communication in Medicine*' should be deleted.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

"Is instrumental delivery a cause of idiocy".

To the Editors of THE LANCET

SIRS,—In your issue of Jan. 5th, under the above heading, reference is made to a paper in a Dutch medical journal by Drs. Winkler and Bollaan on the "Forceps as a Cause of Idiocy", and it is stated that "they are disposed to think that the use of forceps is much more frequently the origin of idiocy than is generally supposed". I am afraid that if this statement is allowed to go forth to the profession uncontradicted, great harm will result; for the researches of those of us who are engaged in the training and treatment of idiots and imbeciles prove that the use of the forceps has much less influence than their disuse in the production of idiocy and imbecility. I have for some years taught the students, who are sent here by some of the lecturers on psychological medicine, that prolonged and difficult labour is a potent cause of imbecility, and that in such conditions it is better to put on the forceps than to run the risk of prolonged compression of the head, resulting in asphyxia, paralysis, and other evils. Of course, one supposes that the forceps will be put on carefully. I have lately been inquiring into this very subject, and, putting aside the

predisposing causes of intemperance, insanity, imbecility, epilepsy, &c., which are often present, I find that of 810 cases, in which I have been able to obtain histories, only thirty-five, or 4.3 per cent, are said to be due to the application of forceps, while 216, or 26.6 per cent, are due to the prolonged and difficult labour. Further, the majority of these cases, when born, were not only asphyxiated, but were in a helpless condition, some having lost the use of their legs, others becoming subject to convulsions. Moreover, the head was often crushed, elongated, discoloured, and deformed. On the other hand, in the thirty-five cases which had been delivered by forceps, only seven were helpless or paralysed. I therefore maintain that the use of the forceps is preferable to prolonged and difficult labour, and I would ask the profession not to be misled by the few cases of Drs. Winkler and Bollaan.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

FLETCHER BEACH

Darenth Asylum for Imbecile Children, Jan. 7th 1889.

Reference

The Lancet, 12 January 1889, 97.

Researched by Henry Rollin, Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist, Horton Hospital, Surrey