Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR, *British Journal of Venereal Diseases*

Saunas and syphilis

Sir,

The known medical hazards of saunas include dehydration, tachycardia, electrocardiographic abnormalities, acute gastric dilatation, and renal failure. Recently a man with a skin rash, proved to be due to secondary syphilis by serology, was seen at the Skin Hospital, Manchester. He admitted that he had been in contact with two other cases, one of them in a sauna bath. This prompted a search of the records in the department of genitourinary medicine.

These showed that there had been 182 male patients with syphilis seen in the Manchester clinics in the last 18 months; of these 45 (25%) admitted to sexual contact at a sauna bath. Thirty-six men were homosexual and nine bisexual. Of the 45 patients 18 had primary, 20 secondary, three early latent, and four late latent syphilis.

Not all sauna baths are suitable for sexual activity. In Manchester there are two which are well known to homosexuals and bisexuals; these have small booths so that intercourse can take place on the premises. Tracing of contacts has been extremely difficult as the sexual partners

exchange very little information; occasionally, they know a first name, but even this may be false. Tracing was only possible where there were wives or stable male partners.

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