

In the United States, it is described as indicated only for such life-threatening infections as typhoid fever, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, a rare form of meningitis in children and a few other conditions in which it is considered clearly the drug of choice. Physicians in this country are warned that it may cause infrequent but serious side-effects, including a blood disorder known as aplastic anemia that, in some cases, carries a mortality rate of 30 to 60 per cent. The drug, the labels say, should not be used for trivial infections.

But in Latin America, some companies have recommended chloramphenicol for laryngitis, tracheobronchitis,

pneumonia, gonorrhea, syphilis, abscesses and other diseases in which other and safer drugs can be used. In those countries, the warnings and contraindications are minimal or entirely omitted.

When this situation was called to the attention of the drug companies concerned, the responses included such explanations as these:

"Latin American doctors don't need any warnings. They already are aware of the dangers"—an explanation that infuriates medical educators and other experts.

"Things are different in Latin America"—a view that seems to suggest that

drugs are far more effective and safer south of the Rio Grande.

"What's involved here is an honest difference of opinion—we feel we have enough evidence to show that our drug is acceptably safe, but we can't convince the Food and Drug Administration."

This last explanation would probably be more palatable if the company said one thing in the United States, where its statements are under the heavy hand of FDA, and something different in all of Latin America, where the rules are less rigid.