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*Correspondents are urged to write briefly so that readers may be offered as wide a selection of letters as possible. So many are being received that the omission of some is inevitable. Letters must be signed personally by all their authors.*

*No letter will be acknowledged unless a stamped addressed envelope or an international reply coupon is enclosed.*

## Car seat-belt legislation—third time lucky?

SIR,—The Government has just announced that it proposes to introduce a Bill in the new year to make the wearing of car seat belts compulsory. On two previous occasions in recent years such a Bill has failed, largely through lack of interest by MPs. This has been aided by a vociferous minority objection to such a Bill on the grounds of infringement of personal liberty. Is there any prospect that on this occasion we might make it third time lucky or is the Bill destined to flop yet again?

The introduction of seat-belt legislation in Australia came about in no small way because of the persistent lobby of the surgeons. Can we not follow their splendid example and make our weight really felt by making every effort to see that this most important piece of legislation is passed this time round?

The overwhelming value of such a Bill in saving life and limb surely outweighs the understandable but somewhat overstated argument about interference with personal liberty. If we accept that such a Bill is in the

interests of the public health may I suggest a few ways in which we as a profession might significantly help towards its acceptance? (1) By the direct lobbying of their own local MPs by all doctors who support the Bill. (2) By the widespread publication of any suitable data showing the value of seat belts.<sup>1</sup> (3) By further public statements by authoritative medical bodies (for example, the BMA, the Royal Colleges of Surgeons, the Faculty of Community Medicine and the Medical Commission on Accident Prevention) that they positively recognise the life- and limb-saving value of safety belts and strongly endorse the introduction of legislation for their compulsory usage. (4) By all doctors and nurses setting a public example by wearing seat belts at all times and ensuring that all passengers in their cars do likewise.

If we cannot persuade the politicians to pass this simple life- and limb-saving piece of legislation—of much greater social consequence incidentally than so much other

legislation—then let us at least persuade them to pass laws on the suitable restraint of children in motor-cars. If people want to press the “rights of the individual” argument, then let them think seriously about the “rights of the child” as well—the right to be protected against the stupidity of their parents; the right at least to increase their chances of surviving a serious accident not of their making.

We have been so remiss as a nation on this vital piece of legislation. Let us make sure this time that it gets the priority it deserves.

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<sup>1</sup> Hobbs, C. A. *The Effectiveness of Seat Belts in Reducing Injuries to Car Occupants*. TRRL Laboratory Report No 811. Crowthorne, Berks, Transport and Road Research Laboratory, 1978.

## Zuckerman overtaken

SIR,—As a registered trade union the British Medical Association has a responsibility to promote—through its journal and other means—the specific interests of its members. To that extent much of the content of your leading article (21 October, p 1108) was predictable.

Some of the observations in the leader are readily acceptable to a professional body like