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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.

As stated each week in "Instructions to authors" no letter will be acknowledged unless a stamped addressed envelope or an international reply coupon is enclosed.

## Storage and cooking of poultry

SIR,—We read with interest your recent leading article on this subject (18 November, p 1385). Although we agree with the information it contains, it does give readers the impression that chicken and salmonellas are the principal "skeletons at the feast," particularly during the Christmas festivities.

Salmonellas do figure prominently in incidents of food poisoning associated with poultry but so also does *Clostridium perfringens*, and outbreaks caused by this organism frequently involve large numbers of persons. For example, in the winter of 1975-6 there were 15 outbreaks of food poisoning from turkeys, 10 caused by salmonellas and five by *C. perfringens*. The latter five outbreaks involved more people than the 10 salmonella incidents.<sup>1</sup>

The principal problem at Christmas is not the chicken but the turkey. Chickens, being small, are more rapidly thawed and cooked and are consumed over a shorter period of

time. The large turkey causes problems with thawing (for example, a 30-35-lb bird requires at least 48 h at room temperature), cooking, cooling, and storage. Recognising these hazards, the Department of Health and Social Security in conjunction with the British Turkey Federation has issued a leaflet on the safe preparation of turkeys.<sup>2</sup>

While rapid cooling and correct storage of poultry are of prime importance in preventing the growth of surviving organisms—especially *C. perfringens*, the spores of which are stimulated into germination by cooking and which can multiply rapidly in slowly cooling meat—great emphasis must also be placed on the prevention of cross-contamination. We believe that many outbreaks occur because organisms such as salmonellas are transferred from raw to cooked products via utensils, surfaces, and hands which are not adequately cleaned after preparation of the raw food.

Finally, may we refer readers to a previous

article in this journal<sup>3</sup> which covered admirably the main points in preventing food poisoning from the traditional Christmas fare?

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health Laboratory Service, *British Medical Journal*, 1976, 2, 1082.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health and Social Security Health Notice HN(77)190 and Local Authority Social Services Letter LASSL(77)27, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Noah, N D, *British Medical Journal*, 1975, 4, 714.

## How to organise an international medical meeting

SIR,—I would like to disagree strongly with the plea by Lyn Wilson (4 November, p 1300) that the proceedings of medical meetings should be published "to reach a very much wider audience than those present on the day." This suggestion will cause dismay to many on the international conference circuit. It is relatively simple for an expert to prepare a stimulating review of his subject for presentation, but much more time-consuming and very boring to be forced to spend evenings, weekends, and plane journeys revamping