

BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL

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SATURDAY 30 AUGUST 1980

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We may return unduly long letters to the author for shortening so that we can offer readers as wide a selection as possible. We receive so many letters each week that we have to omit some of them. Letters must be signed personally by all their authors. We cannot acknowledge their receipt unless a stamped addressed envelope or an international reply coupon is enclosed.

Correspondents should present their references in the Vancouver style (see examples in these columns). In particular, the names and initials of all authors must be given unless there are more than six, when only the first three should be given, followed by *et al*; and the first and last page numbers of articles and chapters should be included. Titles of papers are not, however, included in the correspondence section.

A grim experiment—children in cars

SIR,—Your eye-catching leading article on the rise in motorcycle deaths in the United States (9 August, p 406) is a timely reminder to all of us to make sure that a similar repeal of crash helmet legislation does not occur in this country. Every summer—good or bad—the media gives wide publicity to parades by the anti-helmet legislation brigade. Fortunately the vast majority of motorcyclists have accepted the wisdom of crash helmet legislation. A small minority, however, do not seem to be fully aware not only of the folly of not wearing a helmet but also of the dangers of wearing helmets with poorly adjusted chin straps, with unclean visors, and with added paint and stickers.

Since you also mentioned seat belts and freedom of choice I thought it worth mentioning one group of road users who invariably have no choice. I refer, of course, to child passengers in motorcars. They surely have a "right to survival" and a right to be protected against the folly of their parents. The total number of children involved (currently around 80 deaths and 10 000 injuries per annum in Britain) cannot be ignored, yet this is an important area of child road safety that has been largely neglected. It is an area,

however, where legislation may well be more acceptable to the public and to Parliament than the long-delayed (adult) seat belt legislation.

A private member's Bill by Mr George Robertson, MP, on the carriage of children in the rear seats of motorcars has so far failed to receive Parliamentary approval. This Bill only answers half of the problem since it does not require any form of adequate restraint for the child. The recommendations of the Child Accident Prevention Committee¹ of the Medical Commission on Accident Prevention go some way further to meet these requirements. They propose that legislation be introduced as follows: (1) The use of properly fitted and suitable restraint systems should be made compulsory for all children travelling in cars. (2) Children should not travel in the front seat of passenger cars unless properly fitted and suitable restraints are used by the child.

I would like to add to these recommendations the very strong plea that cars be fitted by law with rear as well as front safety belts. In the course of time one would hope that the legislation would progress to the compulsory usage of both front and rear seat belts. The great advantage of the fitting of rear seat belts

is that these can then be used by children with the Hi-Rider child seat,² which has been such a big success in Australia (this is not yet available in this country but is marketed as the "Toppy" in West Germany). This seat, which is easily transferable to another car, raises the child some 10 cm (4 in) above the car seat and allows him to fit comfortably and safely into an adult seat belt. The seat can be used for all ages from 1 to 12, after which adult seat belts become quite suitable. Its use avoids much of the difficulty and expense of fitting a series of special child bucket seats and harnesses.

Let us sincerely hope that we can see some progress in the next year or two in the long neglected area of legislation on the compulsory use of seat belts for adults and children in motorcars.

J G AVERY

Warwickshire Area Health Authority (South District), Leamington Spa CV32 4JB

¹ Child Accident Prevention Committee. *The safety of children in cars*. London CAPC (126 Albert Street, London NW1 7NF), 1980.

² Molnar T E, Rodwell D M. *A new concept in child restraint design*. SAE Technical Paper No 790072. Warrendale, Pennsylvania: Society of Automotive Engineers, 1979.