

BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL

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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.

Care of the unconscious

SIR.—The anaesthetist (rather than anaesthesia) has several important roles to play in the management of severe head injuries, as Dr Jean M Horton (5 July, p 38) and Dr Peter J F Baskett (26 July, p 287) indicate. However, neither referred specifically to a problem of particular significance in Europe, where patients in coma often have to be transferred from primary hospitals to regional neurosurgical units, sometimes urgently because intracranial complications are suspected. We have found that such patients are still frequently transported without due regard to their airway, and often without a nasogastric tube in situ; even when accompanied by a doctor or a nurse untoward episodes that threaten to damage further the already injured brain sometimes occur en route. It is ironic that these should happen to patients transferred within the hospital system (even between one intensive care unit and another), at a time when anaesthetists are becoming concerned with preventing such incidents before patients reach hospital.

Various specialised units now provide for patients from wide catchment areas, so that there are several other conditions that sometimes call for the interhospital transfer of critically ill patients. Every general hospital should therefore consider formalising procedures for the transportation of such patients. Your contributors rightly claim that anaesthe-

tists are well placed to give leadership in this kind of organisational problem; but writing rules will not be enough, because expert advice will be needed about each case as it arises. For example, as Dr Horton so clearly explains, the choice between oropharyngeal, nasopharyngeal, and endotracheal tubes is as important as the skill required to pass them. In order to minimise the use of inappropriate measures that might incur additional hazard

or unacceptable delay, a designated doctor or senior nurse with experience in this field should always be available to make such decisions.

BRYAN JENNETH
DOUGLAS GENTLEMAN

Department of Neurosurgery,
Institute of Neurological
Sciences,
Southern General Hospital,
Glasgow G51 4TF

Dietary prevention of ischaemic heart disease

SIR.—Sir John McMichael has written once again (16 August, p 517) criticising the relevance of diet in the prevention of ischaemic heart disease. He makes a number of points he has raised previously and in addition suggests that the recent report of the National Academy of Sciences, *Toward Healthy Diets*,¹ provides further evidence that "no prevention of coronary heart disease can be achieved by dietetic and drug reduction of blood cholesterol...." Sir John claims that the National Academy of Sciences is the "supreme court of science" and implies that useful comments cannot be made by those associated with the food industry.

Many readers in the UK will not have seen the report nor will they be aware of some of the revelations relating to it which were described

in the national press of the US. The *International Herald Tribune* said: "The [Food and Nutrition] board has strong ties to the food industry. Two members are food company executives and some members from universities are paid consultants to food companies, including egg producers. Although the board receives federal contracts for specific projects, its basic support comes from food industry contributions, which were used to finance the report."² The *Nation's Health*, the official newspaper of the American Public Health Association, said: "The National Academy of Sciences and Olson [a member of the board] confirmed reports that the two men [on the board] receive about 10% of their income from food industry sources."³

Apart from the representatives of the food