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EDITOR'S CHOICE

BMJ

There are some very reasonable letters on chest physiotherapy this week (p 826), but they are only a fraction of all those we have received; many of the others we will not be publishing criticise opinions that weren't in Dr Selsby's editorial, and one wonders why people go on reading statements into articles which are not there. Does it only happen when one section of the medical community feels threatened? In a week following a budget that conspicuously failed to raise the price of cigarettes three more articles provide more evidence against this pusillanimity: social and psychological factors have little effect on birth weight, the main environmental cause being cigarette smoking

(p 795); a meta-analysis of the relation between smoking and stroke has shown an overall relative risk of 1.5, with considerable differences among the subtypes—from 0.7 for cerebral haemorrhage to 2.9 for subarachnoid haemorrhage (p 789). A third article, another meta-analysis, suggests that the changes in cholesterol, triglyceride, and lipoprotein concentrations induced by smoking could account for some of the 70% excess risk of coronary heart disease among smokers (p 784). Finally, an Edinburgh study has shown that the election of a Labour government is associated with decreased numbers of parasuicides and of a Conservative one with increased numbers (p 803).