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EDITOR'S CHOICE

BMJ

One of the potential casualties of the British general election is *The Health of the Nation*, the government's first step towards creating a strategy for health for England. Responses to the initial document had to be in by the end of October last year, and a final proposal from the government was planned for the spring. Now it's unclear whether a response will appear before the election, but the debate goes on. In an editorial Andrew Sims argues that marital breakdown should be addressed by the strategy (p 457): it is distressingly common in Britain and may seriously damage the health of both the couple and their children. Later in the journal Philip Poole-Wilson and George Sutton argue that heart failure should be one of the key areas in the strategy because proper treatment of heart failure applied to the whole population would prevent more deaths and possibly morbidity than prevention of its main cause, coronary artery disease (p 504).

These debates are being conducted in a peaceful and relatively wealthy country, but if such a debate was allowed in Iraq very different conclusions would be reached. Sir Donald Acheson, who was chief medical

officer in the Department of Health when *The Health of the Nation* was launched, turns his attention to Iraq in an editorial (p 455). It is quite clear that since the war the health of the people of Iraq has plummeted, and malnutrition among children is common. What Iraq needs most to solve its health problems, writes Sir Donald, is the restoration of a government with the interest of all sectors of the community at heart, but in the mean time more humanitarian aid is needed. On p 513 Peter Kandela gives a powerful personal account of what the war and its aftermath have meant to those who have family living in Iraq.

Finally, this week's journal contains another medical whodunnit. Doctors in Somerset were perplexed when almost 100 people from a holiday centre came forward with a "slapped face" rash (p 477). The local media were full of speculation about the possible causes, and the public health doctors were under pressure to find the culprit. If you want to try your epidemiological skills on this case then avoid the paragraph on the paper at the front of the journal and the structured abstract and start reading from the introduction.