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EDITOR'S CHOICE

BMJ

Ultrasonography is progressively transforming diagnostic imaging, and today's journal contains two examples of where ultrasonography should change practice. Doctors from Liverpool show that ultrasonography alone can be used to investigate most children with urinary tract infection (p 663), while an Israeli group finds that an extended ultrasonographic examination of the hearts of fetuses between 18 and 24 weeks' gestation will identify 86% of major abnormalities in a population at low risk (p 671).

One way of changing practice in primary care is to use facilitators—people who travel from practice to practice helping the doctors and others implement reforms (p 652). The idea was developed in Oxford, and a randomised trial from New Hampshire shows that facilitation was better than education in encouraging doctors to offer services to prevent and detect cancer (p 687). Facilitators are, however, expensive, and an Australian trial of using facilitators, couriers, or post to deliver antismoking kits to general practitioners discovered that facilitators achieved only a slightly

higher uptake of the kit and at a hugely greater cost (p 691).

The attempt to involve ordinary people in decisions on health care services is developing fast, and Andrew Richardson and others show that postal questionnaires can be used by health authorities to rank the importance of services (p 680): thus 81% thought kidney dialysis services very important but only 8% thought the same of services to stop people smoking. It is public opinion that is turning round the government decision of 20 years ago that all babies should be born in hospital (p 657), and it is public opinion which will decide very soon which party is going to govern Britain. The arguments over health service statistics broke out again last week (p 661), and a paper analysing the last tranche of statistics in detail shows just how carefully they have to be considered (p 705). Our point in publishing this paper is not to favour one party over another but rather to emphasise the primary importance of good data in understanding developments in health care or anything else.