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BMJ
Editor's
Choice

Accidents at home and on the farm

Accidents are a major cause of death and disability, yet their epidemiology is little studied and preventive schemes are rare. This neglect results from too many people regarding accidents as random events: *Webster's Dictionary* offers the definitions "chance, fortune, luck" for accident. But accidents are not random. Their patterns can be studied, and they can often be prevented. On p 30 Helen Graham and Julia Firth show that accidents at home among elderly people are commoner than was expected—because few are reported to medical services. General practitioners, argues Brian Livesley in an accompanying editorial (p 2), are the people who should take the lead in reducing accidents among elderly people.

Farms are particularly dangerous places, yet preventive measures in agriculture lag behind those in other industries. Two papers from Wales show that many serious accidents that happen on farms are not reported in the official statistics (p 25) and that a

disproportionate number of the accidents happen in those under 16 (p 23). Peter Baxter writes in an editorial that farm workers face many other occupational hazards apart from accidents; he supports agriculture being made a target industry in the European year of safety, hygiene, and health protection at work (p 6).

Next week's annual representative meeting of the BMA will debate the use of animals in medical research. Peter Lachmann, president of the Royal College of Pathologists, sets the scene with an editorial (p 1). Everybody would prefer not to have to use animals in research, but to stop doing so now would block progress with research into many conditions that cannot be adequately treated. The violent tactics of some members of the animal lobby have obstructed debate on this important issue, but for their patients' benefit doctors must make clear the need for animal research.