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Instructions to authors appeared in the issue of 4 January 1992

Medicine's grandest schemes may gang aft a-gley

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley," wrote Robert Burns, and he might well have been writing of medicine. Many important developments fail to produce real benefit in practice.

Thus thrombolytic treatment of patients with acute myocardial infarction will dramatically reduce mortality if the drug is given quickly, but often it isn't. A study in six hospitals of the delays between patients experiencing symptoms and receiving thrombolytic treatment shows that there is considerable room for improvement at all stages (p 445). Screening programmes may gang a-gley because patients don't like the procedure, and this has been a worry with mammography. Many women have heard stories that mammography is painful, and those organising the services are concerned that this may lead to a fall off in attendance. A study from South East Thames region of 1160 women undergoing mammography shows that 35% reported discomfort and 6% pain (p 443). Within 10 minutes, however, only 4% were experiencing discomfort and 0.7% pain. Furthermore, two thirds of the women

experienced less pain than they expected. The authors conclude that current procedures are acceptable.

Another project that may gang a-gley without careful planning is having an overseas graduate visit your unit. Lindsay Smith and Catherine Marraffa give practical guidance on how to prepare for a foreign fellow (p 460) and note coyly that "British culture embodies a historical perspective that differs significantly from other cultures in attitudes to social relationships, politics, and religion." That seems to be their way of saying that we British can be a weird lot and be ready for anything. In an accompanying article Dan Veale describes his experiences of working for a year in France (p 482): he had an excellent time but wished that he had prepared better.

Finally, Redmond Smith reviews *The Mystic Garden* by Dougal Swinscow, who was deputy editor of the *BMJ* for many years (p 483). The book supports the popular quotation that "if you want to be happy for a night get drunk, for a year get married, and for a lifetime get a garden."

BMJ
Editor's
Choice