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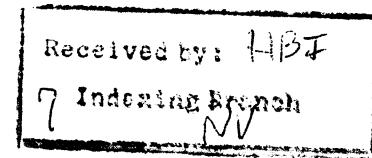


BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL NO 6854 VOLUME 305

INTERNATIONAL

Editorials

- 595 **Avoiding iatrogenic injuries in theatre**
T H Taylor
- 596 **Emergency feeding programmes**
Jeremy Shoham
- 597 **Registering a need**
Liam Donaldson
- 598 **Large volume plastic spacers in asthma**
Duncan Keeley
- 599 **Health checks for people over 75**
Andrew Harris



News 601-604 **Sweden reforms primary care · Thyroid cancer in Chernobyl · Living will launched · Auditing nurses · Specialist training · Australia strengthens Medicare · Illegibility kills patients · The Week**

Papers

- 605 **Simulation model for planning renal services in a district health authority**
P G Bolger, R Davies
- 609 **Evidence for decreasing quality of semen during past 50 years**
Elisabeth Carlsen, Aleksander Giwercman, Niels Keiding, Niels E Skakkebæk
- 613 **Metabolic acidosis and fatal myocardial failure after propofol infusion in children: five case reports**
T J Parke, J E Stevens, A S C Rice, C L Greenaway, R J Bray, P J Smith, C S Waldmann, C Verghese
- 617 **Warming lignocaine to reduce pain associated with injection**
J A H Davidson, S J Boom
- 618 **Purging with paracetamol: report of four cases**
Janet Tiller, Janet Treasure

General Practice

- 619 **Health checks on patients 75 years and over in Nottinghamshire after the new GP contract**
Ken Brown, E Idris Williams, Lindsay Groom
- 621 **Assessment of patients aged over 75 in general practice**
Jill Tremellen
- 624 **Partners in Practice: The developing primary care partnership**
Mike Pringle

Education & Debate

- 627 **Developing a district diabetic register**
S D Burnett, C M Woolf, J S Yudkin
- 631 **How to set up a newsletter**
Tim Albert
- 635 **Lesson of the Week: Diagnostic confusion in diabetes with persistence of fetal haemoglobin**
Douglas A Robertson, Felicity K E Tunbridge, W Garry John, Philip D Home, K George M M Alberti
- 638 **ABC of Colorectal Diseases: Tropical colonic diseases**
B K Mandal, P F Schofield

642-660 **Obituary · Letters · Medicopolitical Digest · Soundings · Personal View · Medicine and the Media · Medicine and Books · Minerva · (in detail overleaf)**

CONTENTS *pages 642-660*

642 Obituary

R P Warin, V W Dix, A Kinsey, J F M E Lamplugh, R J Crawford, G R Ellis, A Campbell, S M Jones, H de Broe Warren

644 Letters

644	Asthma and open cast mining D McBride and others; A S Afacan; J M F Temple and A M Sykes	649	Perineal tears M Griffiths
645	Exercise, fitness, and health M J Kendall and A Head; J Nicholl	649	Cardiac rehabilitation programmes T J Scanlon and S Godfrey
645	Validating the SF-36 S M Hunt and S P McKenna; P Gompertz and others; J Brazier and others	650	Preschool screening for cryptorchidism S Kaul and D P W Roberts
646	Respiratory medicine: the casualties P Dilworth and others	650	Dispensing doctors P Thomas
646	AIDS and ethics in Birmingham M J Wood and others; M Fitzpatrick	650	Back testing devices M Szpalski
647	Litigation over illness associated with tryptophan is possible A Douglas	650	Doctors' legal position in medical emergencies B Dalal
647	HIV infection and certification of death A Riley; J Edeh; K Pugh and J Catalan	651	Eradication of poliomyelitis S C Arya
648	Treatment of natal cleft sinus H P Henderson	651	Nurses' access to subjects for research B Vaughan
648	Over the counter treatment for candidiasis G Forster and D G Webb	651	Congenital toxoplasmosis D O Ho-Yen and others
648	Screening for depression in elderly patients D O'Neill	652	Contact tracing in HIV infection A Wardropper and E L C Ong
648	Human milk banks A F Williams	652	Vocational training and maternity benefits R Arnold and M Brown
649	Self help organisation's advice on myalgic encephalomyelitis M C Hume	652	Confidential illustrations D Clements
649	Using cytokines R Grimble	652	Asian doctors and training in general practice J Bahrami
		652	Advice on health care workers infected with HIV P L Erridge
		652	Irradiation of assistants' hands A S Hollman

653 Medicopolitical Digest

The Health of the Nation moves forward · Scottish council · Care in the community · Consultants in fundholding clinics · Guidelines on private work · BMA Notices-BMA council election; change of division · Correction

655 Soundings Get your cognition enhancers here Ian Robertson A tutorial in alternative medicine Trisha Greenhalgh

656 Personal View

The same the world over Richard Vautrey; More difficult rebuilding people Joan Bicknell

657 Medicine and the Media Finding a voice in the Gorbals Ian Robertson

658 Medicine and Books

658 Bernard Fox: *Oxford Textbook of Pathology* (Ed J O'D McGee, P G Isaacson, N A Wright)
658 Philip Joseph: *Homelessness: A National Perspective* (Ed M J Robertson, M Greenblatt)
659 Best books on general surgery: a personal choice John Alexander-Williams

660 Minerva

Some of the resolutions passed by the BMA's 1992 annual meeting were published on 5 September. The remainder are published this week—Clinical Research, facing p 617; General Practice, facing p 609; International, facing p 627.

From declining sperm to declining brains

Every age tends to have its vision of how life may end. A few years ago we feared nuclear winter. Now we are more scared by overpopulation, the greenhouse effect, and the destruction of the ozone layer. In this week's journal a group from Copenhagen opens up a new possibility for the Apocalypse that contrasts ironically with overpopulation. The group has conducted the most careful analysis yet of data on semen quality and concludes that sperm count has fallen by half in the past 50 years (p 609). Why this should be the group doesn't know, but an environmental explanation seems most likely. It is of course fanciful to think of this paper in apocalyptic terms, but imagine if average height had fallen by half in 50 years.

Whatever the future brings it will surely include ever more intense debates over what forms of health care can be afforded, and a clutch of papers this week contribute to that debate. One uses a computer model to predict changes in the number of patients who will be treated at a regional renal unit by the end of the

century (p 605). No increase in new patients will mean a 40% increase in the number of people on the renal replacement programme, and costs will rise by a third. Where will the money come from? Should it come from the funds currently being spent on screening elderly patients in general practice? Two papers we publish today show wide variation in how such screening has been taken up (p 619 and 621). Some practices have not offered such checks, while others screened three quarters of eligible patients in the first year of the new contract. The question of whether the screening is worthwhile cannot yet be answered, but in an editorial Andrew Harris surveys the evidence so far (p 599).

Finally, we have a new columnist: Ian Robertson, a psychologist, begins his columns with some observations on "cognition enhancers" (p 655). These are now available as fizzy drinks in bars in California, but Dr Robertson observes that Glasgow got there a long time ago with McEwan's Export.

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Editor's
Choice