

# BMJ

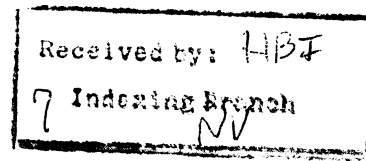
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## 660 Minerva

*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.