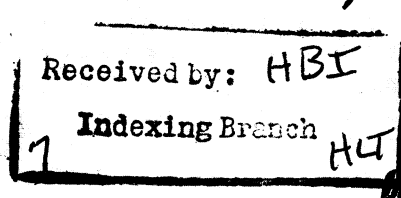


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Emergency cardiac transplantation a better buy than education

Much of the responsibility for making the new NHS work rests with the purchasers—those who must determine what health services a community needs and then buy them as cost effectively as possible. The purchasers will not be able to afford everything, and two papers in this week's journal illustrate the difficulties they will face.

Imagine yourself responsible for purchasing services in relation to heart disease. Your first choice might be to try to purchase services that will prevent disease, and you might thus turn to that panacea—education. Don Nutbeam and others present on p 102 the results of a two year controlled trial carried out in 39 schools of two educational initiatives to reduce smoking. Nothing was achieved in terms of reducing smoking.

The disappointed purchaser may next have to consider what to do about patients so ill with heart disease that they must undergo urgent cardiac transplantation or die. Surely, the purchaser might think, it cannot be sensible economics to spend so much on such sick patients. But a group from the Royal National Brompton Heart and Lung Hospital shows that 20 of 24 patients left hospital after such an operation, 17 were alive after five years, and 10 still worked

full time 61-83 months after transplantation (p 98).

But any purchaser tempted to despair of public health should consider our two papers from Australia. In contrast with the British, the Australians have been deadly serious about public health, and John Powles and Sandra Gifford describe how, in Victoria, well planned strategies have reduced deaths from road traffic accidents and reduced smoking levels (p 125). And on p 120 Simon Chapman and Stephen Woodward report how the tobacco industry suffered two major setbacks in the week before Christmas: a bill to ban all remaining forms of tobacco promotion finally passed through both houses of federal parliament, and the Federal Court of Australia ruled that the industry's claim that "there is little evidence and nothing which proves scientifically that cigarette smoking causes disease in no-smokers" was misleading and deceptive.

Finally, readers in search of the unusual might like to read Bernard Dixon on "Why do female adders copulate so frequently?" (p 150) or Ralph Crawshaw on how greed is a serious problem among doctors (p 151). Alternatively, they might admire the beauty of a condyloma acuminatum found on the hard palate of a woman from Birmingham (p 154).

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Editor's Choice