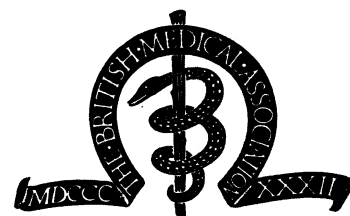


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Instructions to authors appeared in the issue of 2 January 1993, p 55

The answers to some simple questions

Despite the tens of thousands of biomedical journals many simple questions in medicine have not been answered. For instance, when should the umbilical cord be clamped in preterm infants? Or what are the risk factors for endometriosis? Answers are offered to both of these questions in this week's journal.

A prospective randomised study of preterm infants delivered vaginally has shown that holding the baby below the introitus for 30 seconds before clamping the cord reduced the need for blood transfusion and mechanical ventilation (p 172). The question now arises of what to do when the baby is delivered by caesarean section. An Oxford group has looked at risk factors for endometriosis in over 17 000 married women and found the expected associations with age and parity but no link with smoking and social class and no long term effect from oral contraceptives or intrauterine devices (p 182). One problem with this study is that it depended on operative confirmation of the endometriosis—and all sorts of biases determine who has surgery. An accompanying editorial reminds doctors that endometriosis does not merit treatment just because it's there (p 158).

Two problems that just won't go away are also addressed in this week's issue. Robert Maxwell

contributes to our series on London after the Tomlinson report by describing how the same problems are shared by many other cities—Boston, Chicago, New York, Paris, Sydney, Belfast, Glasgow, Manchester, and, indeed, almost every city that grew large in the second half of the nineteenth century (p 199). As the American anti-Vietnam protestors chanted whenever the television cameras appeared, "The whole world is watching." Stella Lowry has reached the preregistration year in her series on medical education and points out that the year has two elements—education and service—neither of which has been properly thought out (p 196). An accompanying study from Yorkshire shows that consultants are well aware of the inadequacies of the year and believe that fundamental change is necessary (p 194).

Finally, Nick Black reviews yet another television series on the trouble with medicine and concludes that it is becoming increasingly hard to be original on this subject (p 217). Let's hope that the schoolchildren who watch these programmes and who watched the recent series on medical students being put through the mill (31 October 1992, p 1103) decide to be excited by the challenges of modern medicine. Otherwise, there may be no doctors in Britain by 2010.