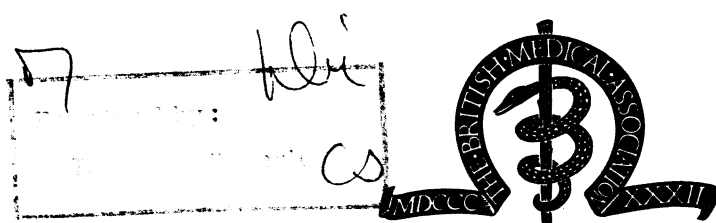


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Pages running with blood

Letters pages, some editors believe, should run with blood. If you accept that as a goal then you will enjoy our pages this week. Sir Robert Kilpatrick, the president of the General Medical Council, kicks off the pages by stating that "There is scarcely an assertion in Richard Smith's editorial about the General Medical Council with which I would not take issue" (p 328). He and six other correspondents disagree strongly with the suggestion by Professor Barry Kay (9 January, p 122) and Richard Smith (9 January, p 82) that the council should be willing to investigate doctors who practise unscientific treatments. But another six see some merit in the suggestion.

After covering academic medicine, occupational exposure to HIV, part time training, and the Tomlinson report, the letters pages end with an angry letter from Professor Peter Townsend (p 337), one of Britain's foremost authorities on poverty, to Virginia Bottomley, now the secretary of state for health but once a pupil of Professor Townsend. He is upset that she should dismiss discussion of the relation between poverty and ill health as "defeatist." He wonders why she should have changed her thinking from the days when she produced a report for the Child Poverty Action Group. This is an important matter because many people

believe that the government's document *The Health of the Nation*, which has much to recommend it, will fail because it so studiously ignores the link between poverty and ill health.

Criticism from Professor Townsend may, however, be the least of Mrs Bottomley's worries at a time when she is presiding over a stalling NHS and about to announce the government's decisions on the Tomlinson report. We end our series on Tomlinson with some positive ideas on how primary care could be developed in London (p 323)—a paper that fits well with another on how primary care could be better managed without the independence of general practitioners being destroyed (p 308).

When the announcement on Tomlinson does come—and it is expected soon—much of the media attention will focus on what happens to St Bartholomew's Hospital. On p 341 Tony Delamothe analyses the hospital's high profile media campaign to save itself. Whatever the result, some of those who work in the hospital will probably cringe over the hyperbole: "No hospital in the world is doing better research or achieving better results"; or "No one knows more about hormones than the Professor of Medicine, Michael Besser, who invented endocrinology."