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Cancer, chance, and the diversity of doctors

A surprising finding from the Medical Research Council's trial of treating hypertension in elderly patients published in the *BMJ* last year was an association between atenolol and death from cancer. That atenolol might cause cancer was a worrying finding, and two groups set to work to investigate the possibility. Neither group has confirmed the association (pp 609 and 622).

Another paper published today allows a test of the Gardner hypothesis that excess cases of childhood leukaemia around nuclear installations may be caused in part by paternal exposure to radiation before the child is conceived. In a case-control study of leukaemia in children living around the atomic weapons establishments at Aldermaston and Burghfield, Eve Roman and others have found an association between fathers being monitored for exposure to penetrating ionising radiation and leukaemia (p 615). But because of the small numbers the finding could be due to chance, and the study neither strongly supports nor disproves the Gardner hypothesis.

The advent of the changes in community care are now just a few weeks away, and many doctors are still hazy about what the changes will mean. In a further attempt to help doctors and others understand what is happening we begin today a series in which various participants describe what the changes will mean for them (p 635).

Finally, our obituary columns bear witness this week to the remarkable range of people who make up the medical profession. William Serle was not only a physician but also a minister in the Church of Scotland and a world famous ornithologist (p 646); Donald Vaughan, despite being under age, joined the Royal Flying Corps in the first world war and then spent years as a lifeboat doctor in Norfolk (p 645); and Frank O'Gorman (known to all as FOG), a surgeon, played football for Glasgow Celtic reserves and lived throughout his career in the grounds of the then City General Hospital in Sheffield with a succession of Staffordshire bull terriers.

BMJ
Editor's
Choice