

BMJ



BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL NO 6881 VOLUME 306

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Neglecting the elderly and exploiting the young

The old and the young feature prominently in this week's journal. In the week before community care begins and all junior doctors are supposed to be down to 83 hours a week we look at how the NHS is offering a poor deal to elderly patients and to junior doctors.

Long term beds in the NHS are rapidly disappearing, and John Kellett says that in practice the NHS is abrogating its responsibility to provide long term care to elderly people (p 846). Rather, they are increasingly being cared for in the private sector, and a study from Leicester confirms that those in residential homes need much more care than they did a decade ago (p 827). Professor Grimley Evans points out in an editorial that the present arrangements may mean that one elderly disabled person might be looked after free in an NHS bed while another identically disabled person might be financially bled while being looked after courtesy of "community care" (p 806). Dr Kellett argues the merits of the NHS offering 13 weeks of free treatment and then beginning to charge local authorities about £500 a week: the local authorities would then pass on the charges to those who could pay. The problem of how to pay for long term care for elderly people is likely

to get worse in Britain—and in many other countries.

The deadline for junior doctors to be working only (yes, only) 83 hours a week is likely to be met in most hospitals, on paper at least. But the message from Luisa Dillner's editorial is that getting down to 60 hours a week will demand more fundamental changes (p 807). Another aim of junior doctors is to receive high quality training, and Maureen Baker looks at ways of improving the currently poor educational content of the senior house officer year (p 808).

Young patients as well as young doctors feature in the journal, with a scientifically fascinating paper on how the lung function of children may be influenced by the intrauterine environment and respiratory illness, particularly wheezing, by prematurity (p 817). A letter from New Zealand describes how "red nose days" may have been much more important than publications in scientific journals in discouraging parents from putting their babies to sleep prone (p 858).

Finally, the pictures that appear on the Minerva page have proved so popular with readers and contributors that we will now be running an extra full page of pictures every so often. The first appears today (p 870).

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Editor's
Choice