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A statement on access to medical records for the purposes of medical audit by the audit working group of the conference of medical royal colleges is published facing p 913 (clinical research); facing p 931 (general practice); and facing p 896 (other editions)

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

Something borrowed, something blue . . .

The content of any issue of the *BMJ* does not become clear until a few days before it is printed. Although some sections of the journal—particularly the original articles—move on a time scale of weeks rather than days, other sections—the news, for example—come together as late as we can manage without causing palpitations in our typesetters. We thus never know quite how close we will come in any week to the ideal issue, but the ideal should contain something useful on a common clinical problem, something scientifically fascinating, something intriguing, something of international importance, and something funny. This week's issue comes close.

Andrew Frank's review of low back pain looks at one of the commonest clinical problems—and one that is generally not well managed (p 901). One message is that multiprofessional management in the acute stage can make a long term difference. Another is that the best strategy for managing low back pain is long term and preventive and depends more on the patient than the doctor.

Scientific fascination is provided by Zhengming Chen and colleagues, who show that the association between low serum cholesterol concentration and cancer may be partly due to infection with hepatitis B virus (p 890). The virus can cause both. Meanwhile,

something intriguing comes in a letter from Simon Collins showing a statistically significant increase in overdoses with paracetamol after a popular British television drama, *Casualty*, included such a case (p 926).

Little is more internationally important at the moment than what is happening in Russia. But as the power struggle continues in the Kremlin people all over eastern Europe are facing dreadful problems. Michael Ryan describes how Russia's new health minister must tackle problems not only of funding the health service but also of falling population, rising childhood illnesses linked to poor diet, and the spread of polio and diphtheria (p 909). Lucy Moore and Jennifer Dixon describe how Lithuanians are trying to improve public health training (p 911), and Sheila McKenzie and others give an account of their advice to a Moscow children's hospital (p 914).

Finally, something funny—in the obituary columns (p 924). Bruce Hepburn wrote six novels, edited a local newspaper, brought up three children, and was almost permanently on call as a general practitioner in Guildford. A man who lived life to the full, he managed to persuade the editor of the *BMJ* in 1976 to publish an obituary of his dog and told the review editor of the *Daily Telegraph* "Send me anything on Scottish or military history or buried Nazi gold."

BMJ

Editor's
Choice