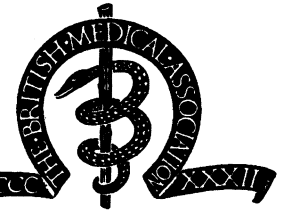
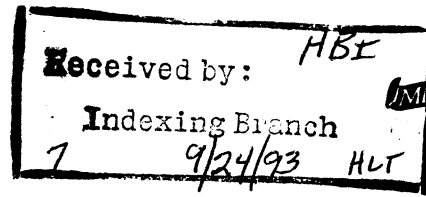


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Editor's Choice

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Rectal thermometers, midwives, whiplash, and whistleblowers

Many parents may not be enthusiastic about laying their babies on their backs to sleep, but they seem prepared to follow recent professional advice. (Change in sleeping position probably explains the halving of sudden infant deaths last year.) How will parents now be motivated to take rectal rather than axillary temperatures when they suspect that their babies are sick? (Medical professional opinion favours the rectal route. From a study of parental attitudes Joe Kai concludes that, given the strength of resistance to rectal thermometry, it's going to be difficult (p 660). And "any benefits must be set against the generation of considerable parental anxiety and the resources that would be necessary to negotiate with parents and change their views."

On p 673 Stuart Handysides examines the Royal College of Midwives' opposition to rectal thermometry, particularly as it related to the introduction of Baby Check, which included rectal temperature in its scoring system. He attributes the college's response mainly to pique (it was not consulted about Baby Check until a month before its launch); its opposition was based on "shaky ethical and scientific foundations."

That some people suffer psychiatric sequelae after receiving multiple injuries in road traffic accidents is hardly surprising. The extent of these sequelae is,

though, as Richard Mayou and colleagues report in what they claim is the first systematic prospective study of the psychological impact of injuries in road accidents (p 647). Interestingly, people who sustained whiplash injury alone developed very similar psychological problems to those with more severe physical injury.

In another study of people injured in road traffic accidents Bogdan Radanov and colleagues in Berne looked at the natural course of whiplash injury (p 652). Post-traumatic headache was common, and a history of headache before the injury significantly increased the likelihood of headache developing later. Nevertheless, they did not rate the contribution of psychological factors to the development of headache as important.

Whistleblowing—that is, going public with information about corruption or malpractice in one's organisation—may be even more hazardous to psychological health than sustaining multiple injuries in a road traffic accident. Questionnaires completed by 35 people who contacted Whistleblowers Australia suggest that whistleblowers risk losing their job, their families, and their sanity (p 667). And mostly, Jean Lennane reports, the corruption and malpractice continue unchanged.