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## General Medical Council

SIR,—The recent threat on the part of the General Medical Council to erase over 5,000 doctors' names from the *Register* has intensified the widespread crisis of confidence concerning that organization among the silent majority of practitioners.

It is illiberal and unjust that this severe penalty should be applied to a group of doctors who are acting out of principle, as though they had been guilty of misconduct.

Sir Keith Joseph will no doubt take steps to mitigate any dislocation and deterioration of National Health Service facilities which will cause inconvenience and hardship to patients and doctors alike and in the long term encourage further drain abroad of medical manpower. If the G.M.C. feel unable to reverse their decision, they should resign as the only reasonable course left to them.—We are, etc.,

DEREK BAILEY  
GUY EDWARDS  
BARRY EKINS  
ANGUS GALBRAITH  
JOHN GRIMSHAW  
ZAIDA HALL  
ANTHONY HARBOTT  
PETER LEACH  
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BEN STEINBERG

Consultant Psychiatrists,  
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Fareham, Hants

SIR,—I must take issue with your leading article (18 November, p. 377). While completely agreeing that the G.M.C.'s recent actions have been arbitrary and impolitic, I

cannot agree that a public inquiry is not the right course. Furthermore, I am not at all sure that "the great majority" of doctors disagree with me. In this hospital only one or two did not sign a petition requesting the Government to institute an inquiry.

To many eyes the performance of the B.M.A. over this matter has been weak-kneed. Representative Meeting after Representative Meeting called for "a majority of members directly elected," and however one twists figures Brynmor Jones doesn't provide that, yet we meekly agreed to his report. Now the Joint Working Party reports (*Supplement*, 11 November, p. 33) on its "talks about talks," and we should remember that the G.M.C. is under no obligation to accept any of the profession's eventual suggestions. The idea that the profession controls the G.M.C. is a myth.

I would agree with Dr. J. F. Pigott (11 November, p. 367), and with him believe that the "private fix" is the technique of backstairs politicians. I would suggest that a public inquiry is the only way we have ever had by which we can arrive at arrangements appropriate to the last quarter of the twentieth century.—I am, etc.,

D. BELL

Hexham General Hospital,  
Northumberland

SIR,—You seem to assume (18 November, p. 377) that the interests of both patients and doctors will be best served by a wholly professional body, and warn against the danger of external controls on the profession's ethics and practice.

No evidence is offered that this is so. So far as patients are concerned it would

seem obvious that their interests should be represented by them and not by doctors. There are now many organizations of high-users of the N.H.S. with particular diseases, thoroughly capable of informed and balanced criticism, there are trade unions with long experience of problems of access and continuity in care, and many other special interest groups concerned with mental illness and other handicaps. Why should they not be represented directly?

As for doctors, their record as the custodian of each others interests is not a particularly happy one. They exploit and cheat one another, with varying degrees of professional dignity, so far as the market will stand, and have usually left their own underprivileged groups, such as hospital junior staffs and immigrant doctors, to fight for their own interests unaided.

Perhaps the G.M.C. should be allowed to die, in the interests of us all. We could then have a serious discussion of the alternatives, based on evidence, and with proper representation of patients as well as top doctors.—I am, etc.,

JULIAN TUDOR HART

Port Talbot,  
Glam

SIR,—The working party's first report on the functions of the G.M.C. has been published (*Supplement*, 11 November, p. 33) and the G.M.C. has debated it. If this is how the future pattern of the G.M.C. is to be, then we must press immediately for a public inquiry. The working party was prepared to ask the important question as to whether there should be a body such as the G.M.C., but the chairman ruled that any questions on its composition as recom-