tioners and the aspiring but unregulated professionalism of complementary practitioners, and the challenges that face the health care system in order to achieve reconciliation, integration and the best possible care for the patient.

Sharma draws upon her own and a wide range of published research, mostly sociological or anthropological but all pertinent. Her style is lively and readable, and her commentary on the various themes is perceptive. The book is always interesting, often entertaining, and should certainly encourage a better informed, more thoughtful and more constructive approach to a subject that is likely to be high on the medical agenda of the 1990s.

JEREMY SWAYNE
Homoeopathic physician, Wells

THE HEALTH OF THE NATION
The BMJ view
R Smith (ed)
237 pages. Price £9.95

The green paper *The health of the nation* is really about the health of the English or those of us living in England. The Secretary of State for Health has asked for consultation, and in an ironic statement says '...a strategy imposed by Govern-

ment which takes no heed of the views of those who will have to implement it, including the people themselves, is valueless.' The *British Medical Journal* seized the opportunity and sought the views of 28 different groups and individuals, but no general practitioner, and have now published the series in book form. The *British Medical Journal*'s commentary is much more lively and interesting than the green paper and a minister looking for guidance will find such help in many of the chapters. While there is disagreement about priorities, everyone is agreed that there should be a strategy for health. In a provocative contribution, the Radical Statistics Group observes that only six out of 151 pages in the document are devoted to action outside the National Health Service although most scope for improving health may actually lie outside the NHS. This is a recurrent theme and there is a recognition of the political disincentives for action with, for example, alcohol and tobacco bringing in an annual £12 billion to the Treasury, while spending on health is £30 billion.

For all that, there is a surprising lack of cynicism in the robust views expressed, and the 'abominable no-men' who doubt the value of screening have been sidelined.

The correspondence provoked by the series of papers as they were published is also included and indicates a lively concern for the health of the nation.

TOM O'DOWD
General practitioner, Nottingham

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