

Tetanus immunization coverage

Sir,
Having witnessed recently a fatal case of tetanus, I would like to draw your attention to the low rate of tetanus immunization coverage in patients presenting at casualty departments covering semi-rural areas, such as Shrewsbury.

While I was Casualty Officer there I took the records of 100 consecutive patients aged 30 years and over whose injuries necessitated tetanus cover, from 1 May 1984 onwards. Taking our guidelines of a full course conferring 10 years immunity, I found only 55 of those patients to be immune to tetanus.

In certain cases treatment necessitates the use of Humotet (£12 a vial against 21.5p per vial for the tetanus toxoid) to supplement surgical toilet. I would submit that (1) tetanus cover in this type of district is not adequate and (2) unnecessary expense is incurred to supplement it.

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Historical note

Sir,
In an editorial on the history of obstetrics (September *Journal*, p.471) forceps are reported to have been introduced in England circa 1733.

During the previous century the Chamberlen family were using obstetric forceps in London; Dr Peter Chamberlen (1601–83) was in trouble in 1649 for practising midwifery when he was a physician and for keeping secret his methods of practice, that is, the use of 'iron instruments'. He therefore moved out from London to Woodham Mortimer, near Maldon.

Arrangements are being made for this and other features of Essex and medical history to be described in March 1985 at Cambridge during the Spring Meeting of the College.

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1985 Spring Meeting

Sir,
The 1985 College Spring Meeting is being held at Cambridge. Anyone interested in presenting a short free standing paper on any medical or allied subject will be welcome.

All contributions should be sent for assessment and acceptance, as early as possible please, to: Dr John Guy, Tavistock, Station Road, Hatfield Peverel, Chelmsford.

By the way, if there is anyone who was a junior hospital doctor with Dr David Owen, MP, I should be most pleased to hear from them.

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The 1984 Members' Reference Book

Sir,
The Royal College of General Practitioners *Members' reference book* for 1984 makes fascinating reading and illustrates contemporary trends.

Alternative medicine is providing food for thought nowadays for many general practitioners who place an emphasis on getting the patient better. The reference book carries an advertisement (p.326) announcing 'fully qualified' practitioners in a variety of west country practices. Such qualifications are notorious for representing a variety of standards, and doctors may be misled into believing that all practitioners so advertised are medically qualified.

Although a tolerant and understanding spirit is needed in the College's approach to alternative medicine, the place of a medical qualification should not be overlooked else the next logical step would be to advertise alternative primary health care specialists who are not necessarily doctors or College Members.

The Faculty of Homoeopathy, the British Osteopathic Association, the British Association for Manipulative Medicine, the British Medical Acupuncture Society, and the British Society for Medical and Dental Hypnosis all maintain lists of qualified or approved doctors and these should be approached first before consulting the *Members' reference book*.

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Courses in medical ethics

Sir,
I want to draw the attention of your readers to the most worthwhile postgraduate course I have ever attended. Imperial College, supported by speakers of international repute in philosophy drawn from many British universities, run periodic intensive courses in medical ethics for doctors and nurses. Though initially daunting in its aims (which for many of us required recourse to dictionaries) the five days debate with colleagues of wide ranging professional interests was a most stimulating intellectual experience; more to the point it was very good fun, if sometimes threatening to expose, define and modify ones views and beliefs.

Further details are available from Dr Raanan Gillon, Imperial College of Science and Technology, 14 Princes Gardens, London SW7 1NA.

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