

A sea change in general practice
Fri 23–Sun 25 April 2004,
Bournemouth

The website of the RCGP Spring Meeting

www.seachange04.com

has now been updated with ALL the presentations, linked both from the speakers' names in the programme and from an alphabetical list of their names.

diary

11 August

Basic Introduction to Manipulation for Acute Back Pain
University College, London
Contact: Deena Harris
E-mail: info@bimm.org.uk
Tel: 01923 220999

13 August

MRCGP Modular Course 2004
RCGP Wales, Gregynog
Contact: Elaine Roberts
E-mail: eroberts@rcgp.org.uk
Tel: 029 20504603

25 August

MRCGP Preparation Course 2004
14 Princes Gate, London
Contact: Cathy Salmon
E-mail: csalmon@rcgp.org.uk
Tel: 020 7173 6073

30 August

MRCGP course
Imperial college, South Kensington Campus
Contact: Ese Stacey
E-mail: esestacey@mrcgpexam.co.uk

5–9 September

European Training in Effective Adolescent Care and Health
EUTEACH programme supported by RCGP and RCPCH
St Anne's College, Oxford
Contact: Aidan MacFarlane
E-mail: Aidanmacfa@aol.com
Tel: 0865 72758

10 September

Priorities in Adolescent Health in the UK
— Getting it Right and Bridging the Gaps
Supported by RCGP and RCPCH
St Anne's College, Oxford
Contact: Frances Perrow
E-mail: fperrow@blueyonder.co.uk

neville goodman

Sick as a parrot

'At the end of the day' is, according to popular vote, our most disliked cliché. Clichés are defined as hackneyed or overused phrases. As a book on usage puts it: language reflects thought. It even, to a large extent, controls thought. So, tired, unimaginative words suggest tired, unimaginative thoughts. Most of us are pretty tired by the end of the day — in both senses. Whenever I hear the phrase, I transform it to 'at the beginning of the night'.

Managers use clichés. Sadly, some managers seem to believe they inject life into their documents. But clichés deaden. Sometimes it's not easy to distinguish a cliché from a stock phrase, which is a phrase having little or no actual meaning of its own, but having meaning only through custom or context. Mostly, stock phrases are spoken — 'Have a nice day' — although not necessarily, and are often just symbols of politeness: we end our letters 'yours faithfully' or 'yours sincerely', when we might have little faith and even less sincerity. So stock phrases merge with euphemism: 'I hear what you're saying ...', which means precisely the opposite.

And what about proverbs? By their nature they are clichés: short pithy sayings that state a general truth are bound to be much used. What better way of illustrating the wisdom of giving people the means to look after themselves than 'Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for life'. But that excellent sentiment languishes on a cliché-finder website along with 'first saw the light of day' and 'bad hair day'.

As an editor, I would expunge 'first saw the light of day'. I think 'bad hair day' works as well as 'heartsink patient', although is less formal. 'Give a man a fish ...' with dots representing the rest of the proverb, is all that is needed and, in that form, in the right context, may be a cliché, but is not tired and unimaginative.

Medical journals contain plenty of phrases weary enough to be clichés. The *Lancet* railed against the conclusion that 'Further studies are needed ...', because they always are. But even the *Lancet* is guilty, in a recent picture caption, of using the tired old cliché that is trotted out every time anyone writes about stem cells. In the media as well as in medical journals, no one can mention stem cells without mentioning diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimer's disease. Such mention means 'Have large grant to maintain'.