

Correspondence

The enigma of general practice

Sir,

A statement by your contributor Dr David Ryde (*J. roy. Coll. gen. Practit.*, 14, 128) cannot go without comment.

In his interesting article he says "the little serious organic disease that occurs is quickly referred to hospital . . ." and he later comments "today doctors need do little for their patients other than show sympathy and understanding".

He then mentions that his prescribing costs are 30 per cent of the local average, while another doctor in the same locality has prescribing costs approximately five times as great.

In our own experience and, I think in the experience of friends who treat all of a local community, there is a great deal of organic disease which can be, and is treated effectively and totally by the general practitioner—and, of course, with higher prescribing costs.

Practices which do not cater for the whole of a defined community tend to become naturally selective. Patients wanting treatment from their own general practitioner will tend to go to one who provides it; those wanting advice and chats only, will go to the general practitioner who provides advice and chats only.

Similarly, those whose lives run in organized groves will gravitate to the well-organized appointment system practice, while those who can't arrange their lives (or use a telephone) will tend to sign on with a non-appointment practice.

It is surely dangerous to draw general conclusions about any 'system' in general practice, either in organization or methods of treatment unless a geographically defined area is reviewed and the vast majority of patients and doctors in it studied.

Coxheath, Nr Maidstone.

H. C. H. BIRD.

An experiment in immunization against measles

Sir,

In the latter part of 1966 it was thought probable that a measles epidemic was to be expected in the spring of 1967. This practice of three doctors and about 8,350 patients is an isolated unit consisting of the town of Hornsea and the rural communities surrounding the town. It was decided to try to immunize all children in the practice who had not had a previous attack of measles. Measles vaccine not being obtainable through the local health authority, after consultation with doctors taking part in the