

## **THE USE OF PUBLICATIONS ABOUT DRUGS TO GENERAL PRACTITIONERS**

### **A unique survey**

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IT IS UNUSUAL TO BE able to report the results of an enquiry that has been answered by 100 per cent of the propositii. The survey here reported was designed to determine how useful the *British National Formulary*, *Prescribers' Journal* and the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin* are to general practitioners. All these publications are issued free to general practitioners in Northern Ireland.

### *The sample of doctors*

There are 704 general practitioners in contract with the Northern Ireland General Health Services Board. A random sample of one in 15 of these doctors was sent a short questionnaire with a covering letter on 10 January 1967. In this sample there were 50 doctors of whom 15 had qualified before 1936, 16 between 1936 and 1945 and 19 after 1945. Forty-one of them qualified at the Queen's University of Belfast, six at other universities in Ireland and three elsewhere. Six of the doctors were women.

### *The questionnaire*

There were four questions. Each doctor was asked to indicate by a stroke of the pen whether he thought the *British National Formulary* was useful or not useful. The same question was asked about the *Prescribers' Journal* and the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*. The fourth question asked which of these last two publications was found most useful. Comments on the publications were invited and there was space for them on the form which doctors were asked to return in a business reply envelope.

### **Results**

Replies were received from every doctor in the sample. The first 29 replies were received by 15 January. It was realized that January is an extremely busy time for practitioners and a second letter was sent on 20 January. The rest of the replies were received by 15 February. The results are shown in table I. This shows that a substantial majority of doctors found these three publications were of use to them in their practice.

Table II shows that doctors differed in their preference be-

**TABLE I**  
**OPINION OF USEFULNESS OF PUBLICATIONS**

	<i>Useful</i>	<i>Not useful</i>
<i>British National Formulary</i> . . . .	45	5
<i>Prescribers' Journal</i> . . . .	45	5
<i>Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin</i> . . . .	39	10

tween the *Prescribers' Journal* and the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*. Twenty-eight preferred the *Prescribers' Journal*, 16 preferred the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin* and six doctors were not willing to indicate a firm preference; five because they thought both publications equally good and one because he thought them equally bad.

It is always of interest to see if those who reply early to a questionnaire differ in any way from those who reply late. Comparison of the answers of these two groups showed no apparent differences except that those who replied early were more likely to make comments. Comments and criticisms about the three publications were received from 26 doctors.

Neither the date of qualification, the medical school from which doctors qualified or their sex seemed to influence replies.

#### *British National Formulary*

Several doctors thought this was badly indexed and that this impaired its value as a reference book. A number stated that they would not wish to be without the *BNF* and that they found the information about drug therapy in it most useful. One asked if *Medindex* and the *Monthly Index of Medical Specialities (MIMS)* could be combined and another said that it would be a great convenience "if the *BNF* had a *MIMS* type of index with an indication of *BNF* alternatives to proprietary preparations". One doctor complained of the recent change of format for he found it difficult to find his way around the book now and one doctor was sorry that latin had been abandoned. One doctor stated that one of the reasons he liked the *BNF* was that he preferred approved names to trade names.

#### *Prescribers' Journal and the Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*

Both these journals had their protagonists who claimed that the journal of their preference had the really useful articles which gave them the information which they found helpful in their practices. Several doctors indicated that although they thought the journals excellent they did not have time to read them. One felt neither was worth the paper on which it was printed and said he got far more value from the visits of drug firm representatives—indeed he suggested the General Health Services Board should employ a number of really well-trained men to visit doctors to keep them informed about drug therapy. There are at present a few representatives whom he considered as "first class and have what it takes to sell their products".

Comments on the *Prescribers' Journal* included "a pleasant and helpful little journal", "useful short postgraduate articles", "less information of use to GPs than the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*" and "the short succinct articles are ideal".

Comments on the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin* included "concise

TABLE II  
PREFERENCE BETWEEN PRESCRIBERS'  
JOURNAL AND DRUG AND  
THERAPEUTICS BULLETIN

<i>Prescribers' Journal</i> preferred	28
<i>Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin</i> preferred . . . .	16
No firm preference . . . .	6

nature helpful", "more information than the *Prescribers' Journal* of use to general practitioners", "interesting and informative" and "is useful but I tend to think it is rather tainted by American influences".

Several doctors wanted the *Prescribers' Journal* and the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin* to be combined. Several commented on the value and ease of reference of *MIMS* and two felt *MIMS* was the most useful of all publications about drugs currently available, especially as it gave details of the size of pack and cost.

### Conclusion

This small but representative survey suggests that a high proportion of general practitioners in Northern Ireland find the *British National Formulary*, the *Prescribers' Journal* and the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin* useful and laudatory comments were made about each of them. It is clear however that the indexing of the *British National Formulary* should be examined to make it easier to use. It would seem that there is a place for both the *Prescribers' Journal* and the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*. They are very different journals, each appeals especially to some doctors and both are found useful by the majority of general practitioners despite the fact that both journals are written for doctors in the hospital services as well as in general practice. The Northern Ireland General Health Services Board is to be congratulated on its policy in supplying both journals to all doctors in its service; it is this which has made it possible to compare the usefulness of the two journals in this survey.

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## THE SURGERY OFFICE

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THE INCREASING amount of clerical work in the general practice of today calls for consideration of methods in coping with it. The days when the average doctor kept his correspondence, records and data in an assortment of boxes, cabinets and odd drawers have gone for good and, if he is to have any peace of mind, the paperwork of his practice must be stream-