

After becoming a member of the Royal College of General Practitioners, he closely identified himself with the aims and objects of the South-east Wales Faculty, and was, for a period, a member of the faculty board.

In 1968, his name was added to the Commission of the Peace for the City of Cardiff, and despite ill-health, he carried out his obligations as a magistrate until his untimely passing.

The far-reaching extent and influence of Hywel's manifold activities speak for themselves. His was a life of unremitting service to his patients, his colleagues, and the public. A man of balanced and mature judgment, and

gifted with a strong personality, he worked relentlessly for the betterment of general practice in all its aspects. He will be hard to replace. We shall always recall his name with respect and gratitude.

In private life he was an ideal family man, sincere, generous, and imbued with a deep sense of Celtic humour. He loved boating, sea-fishing, motoring, antiques and above all, his beautiful home and garden set on Rhiwbina Hill.

He is survived by his wife, Rose, his son, David, and his stepson, Brian to whom our heartfelt condolences are extended.

P. H. THOMAS

Correspondence

Sir,

The papers *Symptom Interpretation in General Practice* by Dr D. C. Morrell and *Diagnosis—The Achilles heel?* by Dr J. G. R. Howie, side by side in the May *Journal*, can be interestingly compared.

Dr Howie in his fascinating paper states that the therapeutic decision in general practice is normally described using a diagnostic label, but presents evidence to show that in fact symptomatic treatment is much more common, although often not recognised as such by the doctors concerned.

Dr Morrell divides the level of diagnostic confidence into symptomatic, provisional, and presumptive for a group of 14 common symptoms presenting in general practice. He also gives the percentage of consultations for each of these common symptoms at which a prescription was issued.

If Dr Morrell's symptomatic and provisional groups are added, a table can be composed comparing prescribing habits with levels of diagnostic confidence (Table). This shows that in all these groups of symptoms, prescriptions were issued at some consultations, sometimes quite large as in disturbance of gastric and bowel function, when only a symptomatic or provisional diagnosis had been made.

This particular paper would therefore appear to conflict to a certain extent with Dr Howie's hypothesis, that symptomatic prescription in general practice is often disguised by a diagnostic label, as the doctors in Dr Morrell's study appear to be willing to prescribe on symptomatic or provisional diagnostic grounds alone.

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DIAGNOSTIC CONFIDENCE AND PRESCRIBING

TABLE: DIAGNOSTIC CONFIDENCE AND PRESCRIBING

| Symptoms | Diagnostic confidence per cent | | Prescription per cent |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| | Symptomatic + Provisional | Presumptive | |
| 1 Cough | 24 | 76 | 97.3 |
| 2 Rashes | 35 | 65 | 79.1 |
| 3 Sore throat .. | 11 | 89 | 95.1 |
| 4 Abdominal pain .. | 78 | 21 | 73.1 |
| 5 Disturbance of bowel function | 87 | 12 | 88.8 |
| 6 Spots, sores and ulcers | 19 | 81 | 82.4 |
| 7 Back pain | 60 | 40 | 88.4 |
| 8 Chest pain | 51 | 49 | 81.0 |
| 9 Head pain | 67 | 32 | 79.9 |
| 10 Joint pain | 55 | 45 | 70.2 |
| 11 Disturbance of gastric function | 74 | 26 | 78.7 |
| 12 Changes in balance .. | 69 | 31 | 66.2 |
| 13 Disturbance of breathing | 25 | 75 | 69.0 |
| 14 Changes in energy .. | 57 | 41 | 90.2 |

REFERENCES

- Morrell, D. C. (1972). *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, **22**, 297-309.
Howie, J. G. R. (1972). *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, **22**, 310-15.