

This is a fair division of responsibility between the two parents; the wife taking the 'pill' until the family is complete, and perhaps for a few years thereafter, and then her husband undergoing vasectomy.

Since offering vasectomy free of charge to registered patients of this practice, we have found that the 'pill' is much more acceptable; women are much happier to take it when they know that they are not being asked to take it until they are 45 years of age or more. Also, my impression (it can be no more) is that the minor side-effects attributable to the 'pill' are less common in these circumstances.

It seems strange that when so much care and planning are put into the acquisition of, say, a car, couples are still willing to rely on less-than-perfect contraceptive practices when planning their families.

I therefore make a plea for the 'pill' to be looked upon as the normal contraceptive for the early years of marriage, with the promise of vasectomy as the normal contraceptive, at the appropriate time, later all other methods (for the normal couple) being consigned to limbo. Vasectomy thus serves a double purpose: it is a fully reliable means of contraception which is free from fear of side-effects, and it increases the acceptability of the 'pill' in those years when it is most useful.

J. J. HOBBS

Lintonville Medical Group,
Ashington,
Northumberland.

REFERENCE

Altman, M. (1972). *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, **22**, 406.

(See *Editorials and paper*).

1959 MENTAL HEALTH ACT

Sir,

I have been asked to join a working party of the Royal College of Psychiatrists to review the working of the 1959 Mental Health Act.

Any college member who has strong views or ideas on the way the Act functions, or malfunctions should communicate with me.

C. A. H. WATTS

The Limes,
Ibstock,
Leicestershire, LE6 1JJ.

BALINT CONFERENCE

Sir,

I was very pleased to see Dr Paul Freeling's account (June *Journal*) of the Balint Society's International Conference at the Royal College of Physicians in March 1972, and particularly that he referred to the fact that the ideals represented by the term 'patient-centred medicine' are central to the development of general practice all over the

world. This term was my choice for the title of the book I have just completed editing for publication, which is based on the 56 papers read at the conference.

It has been possible to extend Michael Balint's original ideas about the doctor, his patient and the illness into three parts in the book:

- (1) The doctor and his training,
- (2) The patient and his relationship with the doctor,
- (3) The illness and its treatment.

The fourth part of the book is devoted to the eight papers of the first morning session of the conference—in *memoriam* to Michael Balint; but they are not simply eulogies, but a description of the effects that Balint's work and ideas have had on the practice of medicine all over the world.

Patient-Centred Medicine will be published in late October 1972 and will be available from Regional Doctor Publications Ltd. at £3.50 plus 30p for package and postage.

PHILIP HOPKINS

Regional Doctor Publications Ltd.,
249 Haverstock Hill,
London NW3 4PS.

REFERENCE

Freeling, P. (1972). *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, **22**, 409-10.

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