

Acupuncture

Sir,

Dr Koh's article on acupuncture (*April Journal*) puts me in mind of Abraham's box, which was conscientiously investigated by Lord Horder in the 1930s. So inscrutable was the box that it was able to recognise avian syphilis, which had hitherto eluded the diagnostic acumen of our most renowned physicians. It might have taxed the wisdom of Chairman Mao himself.

There is always a plentiful supply of rich hypochondriacs who willingly part with their money for the latest magical cure. And they *do* really benefit from it. The magic changes its name as time goes on, and I can remember Couéé, pelmanism, Oxford group, osteopathy, Abraham's box and scientology.

All these cults had their day, and their devotees assured one that they had been cured at last, after all the doctors had given them up. We are told that faith will remove mountains, and perhaps it is lack of faith (in anything at all) that these people are suffering from.

FREWEN MOOR

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Prescribing in general practice

Sir,

With reference to *Prescribing in General Practice*, your editorial of March 1973, I would like to comment on what happened to me when I entered over 40 years ago, as an assistant to a very experienced, political and committee-obsessed colonial type of doctor.

I was told always to give medicine as we were only paid for the medicine and not for the advice; another doctor told me: "My medicine is always pink"—I assured him that "I could imagine no other colour". The patients were impregnated with the ideas that the doctor must give medicine (or pills—but they did not like them alone) or

else he did not know his job. I had a very difficult time in trying to show that the attitude of mind (and receptivity to what might be thought to be new ideas) was that which mattered so as to have a *Mens sana in corpore sano*—one not clouded by doubtful mixtures: that is if they were taken as ordered.

One old lady is said to have left her doctor in her will, a chest which, when he opened it, was full of the unopened wrapped medicines which he had prescribed during the time he had attended her.

I am so glad the profession is taking such an interest in this matter now for so many of the public still take their own medicines of all kinds without letting us know—even when we ask them—their attitude is that they have always taken what suited them and do not consider these as medicines. The fact that private patients have to pay for the dispensing of their prescriptions tends to make the doctor concerned more careful in ordering. I have now retired from general health service practice and see things from a colleague's practice where he only deals with private patients. Doing locums there is instructive.

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Physical Fitness

Sir,

Would doctors interested in the study of physical fitness and in various sports please write to the Institute of Sports Medicine, 10 Nottingham Place, London W1M 4AX. The Institute intends to carry out relevant investigations in which the co-operation of interested and experienced medical practitioners is invited.

P. SEBASTIAN

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10 Nottingham Place,
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CLIMATE AND CHEST DISORDERS IN SCHOOLCHILDREN

A survey of the respiratory disorders in schoolchildren from rural areas showed no significant differences between the United Kingdom and Australia and New Zealand in loss of time from school owing to chest illness. Contrary to expectations the warmer the region the greater the prevalence of bronchitis, asthma and hay fever. These results should encourage a critical appraisal, of the respiratory benefits of warmer climates, and also suggest that the English climate should prove to be no more than a minor barrier to any future reduction of respiratory mortality in the U.K.

REFERENCE

Cullen, K. J. (1972). *British Medical Journal*, 4, 65-67. (Author's summary).