

available, it is reasonable to suppose that a contribution to its costs might be forthcoming from the Department of Health, or the Scottish Home and Health Department.

However, for the moment it would be most valuable for us in developing the system further to find out from general practitioners what their level of interest might be, were such a facility available today. Accordingly, I should be grateful if your readers would write to me, at the address below, or telephone Mossley (04575) 3315 during office hours, indicating their enthusiasm, or lack of it, for the topic.

ROBERT A. JOHNSON

16c Clough Lane,  
Grasscraft,  
Oldham, OL4 4EW.

#### REFERENCE

Keele, G. (1976). *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, **26**, 382-83.

#### PREGNANCY TESTS

Sir,

Dr Constance A. C. Ross comments on the demand to hospital laboratories to perform pregnancy tests (*May Journal*).

The number requested by general practitioners who normally perform the test themselves is small. Modern methods of doing a pregnancy test on the urine are hardly more time consuming than the quantitative test for sugar in the urine.

If the test is performed in the surgery, the patient is saved several days of sometimes agonising waiting.

G. S. PLAUT

57 Upper Tooting Park,  
London, SW17 7SU.

#### REFERENCE

Ross, C. A. C. (1976). *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, **26**, 356.

#### VALUE OF CASE CONFERENCES

Sir,

It has recently been brought to my notice via the press that the Royal College of General Practitioners in its written evidence to the Select Committee on Violence in the Family did not appear to be very enthusiastic about the role of case conferences in this particular family problem. We have all found, having as we do a good relationship with our local social workers, that case conferences help to clarify who should take primary responsibility in the future handling of a family's problem. The actual role of the case conference is also of great value in sharing and pooling ideas and information.

There is, in fact, a problem regarding confidentiality, but with understanding from the workers in other fields with whom we have achieved personal relationships, we find that many problems can be overcome without detriment to the patient.

We also find that the generic social worker, who is much maligned by many members of our profession, is in fact very useful within the context of whole family medicine. The previous specialised social worker often meant that only part of a family problem was taken up by each social worker.

In summary, therefore, we find that case conference techniques are useful for the handling of family problems with regard to violence, and that one of the most important aspects of working with social workers is not what title they have, but how good a relationship we can achieve with them.

E. R. CARTER

D. G. COLIN-THOME

D. M. SMITH

P. I. VARDY

The Health Centre,  
Castlefields,  
Runcorn, WA7 2HY.

### BOOK REVIEWS

**Problem Centred Learning (1975). The Modified Essay Question in Medical Education: A Handbook for Students, Teachers and Trainers.** KEITH HODGKIN AND J. D. E. KNOX. Pp. 152. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone. Price £2.75.

Modified-essay questions as a method of assessment of medical practitioners were perhaps a natural evolution from the different techniques which the College considered and developed since the examination for its membership was first introduced in 1965. The growth of importance of this technique underlines the success of the MEQ

as an assessment tool, but belies the difficulty which is experienced by examiners in designing each stage of the constituent part of the MEQ.

It is fitting that two of the main originators of this method should have compiled this book, as much as a guide to would-be candidates as an aid to course organisers for group learning, and as a demonstration of the learning process to those learners and teachers who wish to build a scientific approach to problem framing and problem solving.

The first and larger section of the book gives examples of MEQs, and the lay-out enables the