

in practice 30 years ago. Such anecdotal material from Dr Gray contrasts strangely with his own insistence on page 14 that a stimulating atmosphere is ensured by the custom of challenging all statements with the question 'what evidence?' which promotes critical thinking.

Generalizing from very small samples is almost a national pastime, but it can be dangerous. On page 18 Dr Gray makes much of the comments of junior medical staff in the hospital (he does not say how many) of "a well-known British medical school". These young doctors are said to have had little time alone with their consultant and in the next sentence this is unfavourably compared with the trainee-trainer situation. I hope he is right but I would be happier with real evidence. Not all trainees have been wholly satisfied with their experience.

Finally, on page 21 we are told that a bank of multiple choice questions is being constructed to cover the syllabus, and an example is given in which the learner is asked to say whether the projected increase in the over-75 population by 1985 is: five per cent, ten per cent, 20 per cent, 25 per cent, or 30 per cent. As MCQ Co-ordinator for the MRCGP examination I have spent much time over several years constructing, recruiting, scrutinizing, testing (through a small panel of experienced general-practitioner examiners), and evaluating multiple choice questions by advanced computer analysis techniques; I feel justified therefore in challenging the validity and relevance of this Exeter question which I hope is atypical (of course if atypical it should hardly have been cited).

I have other criticisms of Dr Gray's paper but let me end by saying how stimulating I found both those parts I endorse and those I do not. I see the efforts of Dr Gray and his colleagues to develop a progressive training scheme as both admirable and impressive. Thus I would hypothesize that their declared belief in the value of criticism will ensure (all italics in this paper are mine) an educated and spirited response to my letter, while preserving what I can assure them from my side is a real

personal regard. It is through such criticism that we can all hope to improve vocational training.

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References

- Gray, D. J. Pereira (1977). *A System of Training for General Practice. Occasional Paper 4*. London: *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*.
- Leeuwenhorst Working Party (1977). *The General Practitioner in Europe*. Report of the Working Party on the Second European Conference on the Teaching of General Practice. *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 27, 117.

INFANTILE COLIC

Sir,
In recent months we have had many complaints of severe infantile colic not related to organic disease.

In a sample of 75 babies born between 1 January 1977 and January 1978 and still living within our practice area, 48 have been brought to a doctor for medical advice. Routine advice about feeding problems given by our health visitors and at the welfare baby clinic has not been included in this total though many of the mothers and babies have had extensive support. Thirty-three babies (25 bottle fed, five mixed breast and bottle, three purely breast fed) had symptoms sufficiently severe and/or prolonged to warrant a prescription of, most commonly, dicyclomine hydrochloride.

Is this problem widespread with the new infant formulae milks or have we been particularly unfortunate? Some of the babies required many weeks of treatment. Most, but not all of the mothers obtain their milk supplies through the local clinics at reduced prices, so most babies have been given the same commercial brand.

In the original sample of 75, I excluded only two babies from random selection. One child had been in hospital for gastrointestinal disease and one family did not speak English and did not adhere to European methods of infant feeding.

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RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

Sir,
The College has a declared commitment and an organization to initiate, finance, and co-ordinate research in general practice. However, at present, the limited amount of time that practising doctors are able to devote to research is an inevitable restriction on any research project.

With the increase in vocational training schemes there is now a large number of doctors who are familiar with general practice. Not all of these doctors feel ready to join a partnership immediately and many would welcome the opportunity to study various aspects of general practice in greater depth.

May we suggest that the College considers offering a number of research fellowships to its new members? If there was financial support for a year's fellowship with the option to submit an MD thesis, we feel sure that there would be many applicants. To have a number of such full-time researchers would help to consolidate the body of research that general practice needs so much.

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BOOK REVIEWS

MEMOIRS OF A SURGEON

Hedley Atkins

Springwood Books, London (1977)
259 pages. Price £3.95

This is a well written and extremely readable book which tells us a great deal about one of the outstanding surgical personalities of our days—Professor Sir Hedley Atkins, KBE, DM, M.CH, FRCS, FRCP.

In it the author discusses, in a humble and witty manner, his family background and early home life, his student days, and his early struggles. He recalls his 40-year association with Guy's Hospital, his 24 years with the Royal