

launched in association with the BLAT Centre for Health and Medical Education, to make videocassette programmes available for loan. This scheme is steadily growing in popularity as more postgraduate centres and medical schools acquire videotape recording and videocassette recording equipment.

This year sees yet another experimental venture by the Library—the use of microfiche. Long used by industry to replace old fashioned stores stock cards, and for overseas catalogues, microfiche provides a medium whereby a large amount of information or illustration can be condensed onto a postcard-size negative.

To assess the potential demand for microfiche, the Library has purchased a few copies of audiotape-fiche produced

by the American Society of Hematology.

As the cost of copies of good quality colour microfiche is relatively low, compared with the cost of an equivalent set of colour slides, this makes audiotape-fiche programmes a valuable tool for the individual or small groups engaged in medical education.

### INSTITUTE OF FAMILY THERAPY

Clinical Workshops in Family Therapy, intended for those who have already attended an introductory course and have some clinical experience in family therapy, will be held on Wednesday mornings for 20 sessions, beginning on 10 October 1979. Enquiries should be made to the Course Secretary, Institute

of Family Therapy (London), 5 Tavistock Place, London WC1. Tel: 01-388 3872.

### SMOKING IN PUBLIC PLACES

British Rail is planning to increase the no-smoking accommodation in both Inter City and local services. London Transport have announced that they are considering a complete ban on smoking on buses and on the underground; one major airline has recently extended facilities for non-smokers and others are considering doing so.

There has been a marked increase in the provision for non-smokers in restaurants and catering establishments, and nearly all London theatres now ban smoking, as do a growing number of shops.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### TRAINING STAFF

Sir,  
A joint Working Party set up by the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Association of Medical Secretaries met for discussions in February 1978, and since that time has held further meetings.

Terms of reference are as follows:

1. To suggest a national syllabus from both organizations for basic and continuing training of secretaries/receptionists in relation to general practice.
2. To promote co-operation between RCGP local faculties and the AMS in the arrangement of local courses.
3. To assess training facilities.

Particular points under discussion are:

- a) Facilities for in-service training for people already in post.
- b) Formal links at regional level.
- c) Publicity.
- d) Career structure.

Decisions taken so far include the following:

- a) That AMS syllabuses be the basis for all training for medical secretaries and receptionists in general practice.
- b) To facilitate arrangements of in-service training and maximum co-operation at local level, names and addresses of honorary secretaries of RCGP local faculties and AMS regional representatives have been exchanged.

c) Publicity—Lists of colleges of further education offering full and part-time courses for receptionists and medical secretaries will be published. 'Ad hoc courses' will be publicized as and when information is received. Co-operation of all those involved in planning and running such courses is being sought to assist in feed-back and evaluation.

d) To provide an opportunity for a career structure for general practice medical secretaries and receptionists the possibility of offering middle-management courses for practice secretaries is being explored.

At present we feel there is very little information about the scale and scope of existing non-examined courses for medical receptionists and secretaries for which appropriate certificates are available. The Working Party will be grateful to hear from any member involved in the planning, running, and assessment of any such courses, whether they are successes or failures.

Further meetings of the Working Party have been arranged.

ANNE PLUMLEY  
*General Secretary*  
*Association of Medical Secretaries*

STEPHEN OLIVER  
*Chairman*  
*Joint AMS/RCGP Working Party*  
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Sir,

Your editorial on training staff in general practice (*March Journal*, p.131) rightly points out that most surgery receptionists have been trained in post and have acquired their skills by experience. In making a case for training such staff you suggest that this is a task best handled by the local faculties.

Apart from mentioning Anderson's course for medical receptionists, you have failed to notice other successful courses which have already taken place. In the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire faculty Dr E. H. J. Cotter ran a course in Welwyn Garden City in 1975/76 (Cotter, 1978). Similar courses have taken place in Watford in 1976/77 and in Bedford in 1977/78.

In all these courses finance has not been a problem as the small fee necessary to cover expenses has usually been met willingly by the receptionists' employing doctor. Attendance at the courses has been high and receptionists have gained confidence and insight by sharing problems with colleagues, as much as in the content of the sessions.

A. J. BALFOUR

### Reference

- Cotter, E. H. J. (1978). In-service training of practice receptionists. *Update*, 16, No. 4, 475-479.