

contrast in this respect. Bull (p. 208), reporting on ten years' experience in a general practitioner obstetric unit, shows as others before him (Marsh, 1977) that general practitioner care can produce not just good but excellent results, comparable with the best available reports.

Wilkes and Lawton, however (p. 199), in a different kind of survey, look at the consequences for patients of their discharge from a hospital diabetic unit. This article is more disturbing, suggesting that serious deficiencies of care have been found, and leads one to question the clinical competence of at least some of the practitioners involved. Studies like these are ammunition to those who see general practice as an inferior clinical discipline and they raise major questions about the quality of general practice training and continuing education.

All these articles refer in one way or another to the generalist/specialist relationship. This has changed

greatly, is still changing and, we suggest, will continue to change in the future.

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# Sociology of Health & Illness

THIS *Journal* has commented before (1977) on the close and growing links between general practice and medical sociology. Now a new journal has appeared with the title *Sociology of Health & Illness—a Journal of Medical Sociology*, which has arisen through the inspiration of members of the Medical Sociology Section of the British Sociology Association. It has a British editorial board and aims to be international in outlook. Contributions are now welcome.

The first issue promises well with articles by Peter Conrad on types of social control, Tim Dartington on fragmentation and integration in health care, and a revealing article by David Hunter on coping with uncertainty, which looks at the ways in which decisions are made and resources allocated within health authorities.

Gail Eaton and Barbara Webb examine boundary encroachment, relating to pharmacists in the clinical

setting, and conclude that the medical hegemony remains unaltered. Roger Jeffrey's "Normal rubbish: deviant patients in casualty departments" is a classic of its kind and one of particular value to vocational trainees, especially those whose programmes include casualty appointments. Peter Heller, Maria Riyera-Worley, and Paul Chalfant examine socio-economic class, abnormal behaviour, and mental health. The journal also includes a number of book reviews.

*Sociology of Health & Illness* is published quarterly by Routledge & Kegan Paul, 39 Store Street, London WC1; the subscription rate for 1979 was £8.50, single issues £3.00.

## Reference

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# Prescribing for the elderly in general practice

PRESCRIBING in general practice has emerged as a topic of recurring interest and has been the theme of several issues of this *Journal* in recent years.

Usually the topic has been considered generally but a recent development has been to consider prescribing in relation to age groups. Historically it was prescribing for children which attracted most attention, but now, as the proportion of the elderly in the population rises and about 80 per cent of the very old take some form of medication, attention is turning to older age groups.

Today this *Journal* publishes as a *Supplement* a review of the current literature by Professor J. D. E. Knox, Director of the Scottish General Practitioner

Research Support Unit at the University of Dundee. This gives much detail about the literature on prescribing for the elderly in general practice with comments, principles, and studies. An important point made by Professor Knox is that hospital-based studies should not be too readily extrapolated into the community.

*Prescribing for the Elderly in General Practice, Supplement No. 1*, 1980, is being sent to every reader of the *Journal*, whether members of the College or subscribers. Additional copies can be obtained from 14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, London SW7 1PU, price £2.25.