the stroke patient, and organization and care.
Programmes are available from the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association, Tavistock House North, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JE.

MARIE CURIE MEMORIAL FOUNDATION
The Marie Curie Memorial Foundation is holding a Twelfth Annual Symposium on Cancer at the Royal College of Surgeons of England on 20 May 1980. Information and enquiries can be obtained from the Secretary, Marie Curie Memorial Foundation 124 Sloane Street, London SW1X 9BP.

GREEN LIGHT FOR DOCTORS
Mr Norman Fowler, Minister of Transport, has laid before Parliament new Regulations which will allow doctors to use flashing or rotating green beacons on their cars when answering emergency calls. This will enable other road users to identify a vehicle being used by a doctor hurrying to an emergency.

Doctors' cars using green beacons will not be given high speed priority or any legal immunity from observing either speed limits or traffic signals.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WOMEN GENERAL PRACTITIONERS
Sir,
Dr A. McPherson and Dr J. Small postulate several reasons why women are not becoming partners in the Oxfordshire area (February Journal, p. 108) and suggest that general practitioners should provide adequate part-time career posts. They seem to have forgotten that general practitioners are independent contractors and are also running a business.

Perhaps as women we should ask ourselves why our male colleagues are preferred as partners. Is it because we have more time off for sickness or family problems? Is it because we are less clinically competent, or have been unreliable partners, or is it because many general practitioners have been frightened away by groups of protesting females, just as we are all frightened of an unknown quantity?

Women have fought hard against sexual discrimination in medical school; maybe in doing so we have made our male colleagues wary of us as partners.

Perhaps we should soften our defences a little and reveal that there are extra qualities in a female partner, making her an asset to a practice.

JACKY HAYDEN
Unsworth Medical Centre
Parr Lane
Bury BL9 8JR.

Sir,
Drs Ann McPherson and Jackie Small state that one aim of their article (February Journal, p. 108) is to find out "the ease with which patients, particularly students, may choose the sex of their doctor". They have a section headed Student population, which starts with a remarkable statement that "Oxford is a university city with no student health service". Their source of information about the wishes of women in mixed colleges was a "report by the Oxford University Students' Union Co-residents Committee". No evidence is produced that the view expressed was other than anecdotal.

Ignorance can be a dangerous thing. It is pretty clear that the authors, despite the fact that one is an Oxford graduate, are unfamiliar with the structure of Oxford. Oxford is a confederation of quite independent colleges. Each makes its own arrangements without any reference to the University. Each, therefore, will choose its own college doctor. That doctor is chosen on merit, and it is hoped that he or she will take a special interest in the problems of students and offer medical care of a high quality. Each college pays its doctor an honorarium, for it appreciates that he or she will spend time on matters that could not normally be expected from a general practitioner under the National Health Service. It is made absolutely clear to the students that they are under no obligation to register with the college doctor. That the majority of students do is perhaps a reflection of the fact that they are satisfied with the medical arrangements. There are plenty of very able women practitioners in Oxford with whom students could register if they wished.

The University provides a counselling service run by a professional counsellor, which is accessible to all students. It also provides an environmental health service that deals with medical problems in all university departments. There does not appear to be any hesitancy on the part of students to take advantage of one of the services offered, for example, advice or immunizations when they have reason to go abroad. One in 15 of all students uses our services each year.

The Association of Oxford College Doctors has both female and male members. We are given no information, except secondhand anecdotal assurance, that women students do not get the help they need. The independent Colleges Committee on Student Health has, as far as I am aware, not been consulted by the authors. It would have been possible that it might have been in a position to produce the evidence the authors have failed to provide for us. It would be a great pity if you readers are left with the impression that the Oxford students get a poorer deal than that of students in provincial universities. Though the view may be old fashioned, one may perhaps be allowed to suggest that students who do not like a collegiate arrangement should not have applied to come to Oxford in the first place, but sought their education in a centralized university, where things may be administratively more tidy, but not necessarily better.

BENT JUEL-JENSEN
Medical Officer to the University
University of Oxford
Radcliffe Infirmary
Oxford OX2 6HE.

Sir,
In their article (February Journal, p. 108, 1980), Drs Ann McPherson and...
Letters to the Editor

DIABETIC KETOACIDOSIS

Sir,
The following appeared recently in a journal: "Too many patients are allowed to pass into diabetic ketoacidosis because of delay in diagnosis or poor management of diabetes during intercurrent illness. We still see patients, not previously known to be diabetic, who have consulted their general practitioners with symptoms which should have suggested the diagnosis but whose urine was not tested. In an analysis of 27 consecutive coma patients . . . 15 were new cases. In 12 of those the urine had never once been tested, though they had visited their general practitioners on a total of 41 occasions" (Pyke, 1980). Further comment is unnecessary.

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Darbishire House
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MEDICAL INFORMATION

SIR,
The Medical Information Review Panel is a committee of 13 members of the medical and information professions which will have met six times during the two-year period for which its grant was awarded by the British Library. Its Chairman is Sir Ronald Gibson, CBE.

The Review Panel is trying to discover gaps in information where research projects would be appropriate, which would benefit both provider and user of medical information. During the last few years research has been initiated in such topics as drug information, the use and management of clinical information, and the information needs of different groups of users within medicine.

The Panel is now coming to the end of its discussions and will report in September. As Research Officer, I should like to hear of any research project, whether planned or completed, private or publicly funded, related to information in medicine. Would anyone with news of such research please write to me at the address below. I shall be happy to provide further information about the Review Panel on request.

PENELOPE E. COCKERILL
Information Research Officer
Medical Information Review Panel
Royal College of General Practitioners
14 Princes Gate
London SW7 1PU.

MEDICAL MICROSCOPY IN GENERAL PRACTICE

SIR,
I must take strong exception to the publication of the article "Chest pain among oral contraceptive users" (January Journal, p. 33). No doubt Dr Williams benefited greatly from carrying out his survey—and an interesting student project it seems to have been—but surely it was no more than that. The ambitious conclusions he draws may have been statistically valid, but it is quite unacceptable to rule out a link between oral contraception and chest pain from the study of a mere 500 woman-years.

It worries me that many papers of this calibre have been included in the Journal recently. While such an editorial policy may do a little towards the important College aim of fostering research, it does nothing to gain the College badly needed credibility in the eyes of the ordinary thinking doctor. In my view, the main value of such projects is to give the author experience in collecting and recording data. The results

306 Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners, May 1980