

The New Animal

Sir,
Your leader "A New Animal" (August *Journal*, p.454) gives an enthusiastic welcome to a concept of academic support practices which are designed to attract general practitioners who do not attend or take part in the activities of postgraduate medical centres. It is probably generally true that at present the postgraduate centres attract only a small proportion of general practitioners. They have, however, the great advantage of potential co-operation between general practitioners and hospital doctors.

It is at present quite possible to provide adequate library facilities for general practitioners and small group discussion rooms at postgraduate centres, and most clinical tutors and postgraduate deans would support these activities. General practitioners have much to give in knowledge and experience to hospital doctors. The reverse is also true. Discussions over cases are

generally regularly carried out in post-graduate centres, and general practitioners could well contribute to these activities. Many formal lectures are also of great interest to them. Before we withdraw from this co-operation to yet another special type of organisation, surely it would be best to persuade our trainers, their vocational trainees and our younger colleagues that they can have a fuller role in the centres, which can bring us closer to our hospital colleagues. This will be far better than undertaking independent activities, with the resulting narrowing in interests which this would entail.

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College Finance

Sir,
The September *Journal* (p. 564) reports

that a "sober silence" greeted the Chairman's financial statement at the fourth meeting of the 1981 Council. Losses could reach £75,000 by April 1982.

The examination fee is to rise again, subscription to the College is to be reviewed and the College Appeal continues to ask for money. Surely these efforts to make ends meet should be combined with some simple economies? However, we read in the same report (p. 565) that 10 per cent of the predicted deficit could be saved if members on College business did not travel First Class.

Can the Council really justify their demands for more cash if they are not prepared to tighten their own belts just a little?

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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

The College Computer

As reported in the July *Journal* (p.437), the Council meeting on 14 March 1981 authorised the purchase of a computer for membership registration, subscriptions, word-processing and other purposes. The hardware and its associated air-conditioning were installed at Princes Gate by the end of May by Computer Installation Services; and by 5 June the system was producing work for the June meeting of Council.

Technical Details

The hardware and software suppliers were chosen after a £4,000 study by National Computer Centre. The hardware consists of a Digital DEC 11-34 minicomputer. With storage on 2x32 megabyte hard disks, it has ample capacity to meet all foreseeable requirements of the College, and its central processing unit is capable of servicing up to 16 terminals using separate programs simultaneously.

A visual display unit (VDU) with detached keyboard, a matrix printer with a speed of 180 characters per second, and a VDU console complete the main installation in the Registration Department. A further VDU with letter quality printer is located centrally and available to all authorized members of

staff, with password control. All departments will thus receive the benefit of this "common user" terminal. The CIS and the JCPT will have similar terminals, but these will not be paid for by the College.

Uses of the Computer

Software to meet the College's needs is being developed by Health Computing Ltd of Winchester. The first program to be used will be the word-processing package. A few of the uses of this program are editing minutes and reports, printing repetitive letters, listing committees and storing management information.

Now that word-processing is available, the main task of loading the names, addresses, subscription and other particulars of over 10,000 members and *Journal* subscribers has started. The initial plan is to load into the computer these details for the members of one faculty (Tamar). No confidential information will be kept on the file, except for bank account numbers, which will be fully protected.

The pilot scheme will involve asking members of the Tamar faculty for information not at present held at Princes Gate, but felt to be valuable to support the work of the College and its

faculties. The questionnaire is likely to include educational needs, research interests and membership of committees. Honorary Secretaries of all faculties will also receive the pilot questionnaire, and will be asked for their comments, and a copy of it will be submitted to the *Journal*, inviting comment from all members. From this pilot questionnaire will be developed the final format of all the membership details. All members will then receive a final version of the questionnaire, asking them to check and confirm the details already held, and to complete other questions as they may wish.

Special Interests

The computer will enable the College's staff to serve the membership more efficiently through recording changes promptly, through accurate subscription accounting and regular supply of membership information to Faculty Secretaries. The latter will be able to contact new members at the earliest opportunity, and to identify special interest groups in their faculties and districts. The Officers of Council will also be able to identify those who feel qualified to represent the College on particular topics, and thus involve more members in the central working of the College. In these ways the computer should help the College in its initiatives in reducing the professional isolation of general practitioners and in promoting their continuing medical education. For this reason—YOUR COMPUTER NEEDS YOU.