

Asthma

Sir,
I read with interest your editorial on the management of asthma in general practice (*June Journal*, pp. 323-324).

Those practices considering having a nebulizer system may be advised to look at a manual provided free by Allen and Hanbury Ltd called *Nebulizer Systems and the Domiciliary Administration of Bronchial Active Drugs* (Wilson *et al*, 1981). This provides a brief introduction to the subject and contains details of types and makes of nebulizers and compressors.

A nebulizer for primary care can be made for under ten pounds. Thus a car tyre foot pump with adaptor can drive a nebulizer satisfactorily (Shann, 1981). I have tested this apparatus using a

Cameron-Price polypropylene foot pump, virtually greaseless (use a little Vaseline) and coupled with an Acorn nebulizer. Two ml of fluid containing a sympathomimetic agent, e.g. salbutamol, can be driven off in a fine mist within six minutes of pumping. A bacterial filter could easily be added to the system, but I doubt it is necessary. The system is cheap, robust, maintenance-free and if used by the patient's family (child's parents) avoids the problem of drug overdosage caused by over-use of an electric powered compressor.

Perhaps a new dawn in the primary care of most severe asthmatic attacks has now arrived. No longer will young asthmatic children wait in fear of the needle of intravenous theophyllines but eagerly call for the psychological

reassurance of a nebulizer mist, which is almost as effective.

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References

- Acorn Nebuliser. Available from Medicaid Ltd.
"Easy Air" foot pump with adaptor. Available from Cameron Price.
Shann, F. (1981). Nebulised sympathomimetics in childhood Asthma. *Letter. Lancet*, 1, 329.
Wilson, R. S., Stevenson, R. D. & Phillips, L. A. (1981). *Nebulizer Systems and the Domiciliary Administration of Bronchial Active Drugs*. Available from Allen & Hanburys.

HISTORY

The College Archives

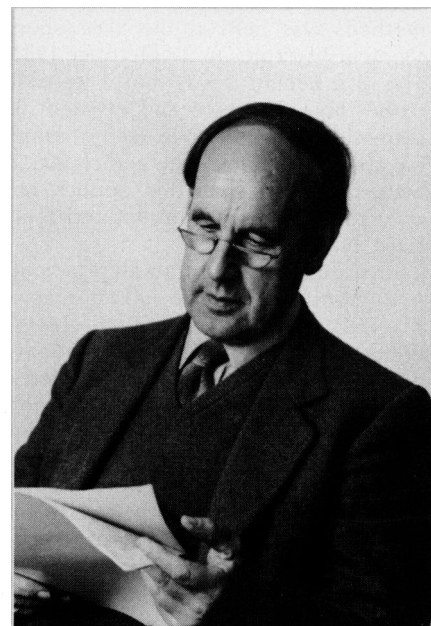
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The title 'archivist' may summon up a picture of an elderly antiquarian with his nose buried in dusty documents so ancient that they can have no relevance to the preoccupations of today or plans for tomorrow. The falsity of that picture lies in the fact that the archives of any institution such as the RCGP stretch continuously from the earliest plans for its foundation to the minutes of last week's committee meeting; they are the complete past history of the College, recent and distant, and they are essential for an understanding of College affairs. The relevance of history—that you cannot know where you are going if you do not know where you came from—may have the appearance of a tired cliché, but it is mentioned here only to emphasize that the archives of the College are, or should be, the concern of everyone connected with the business of the College.

For his part, the archivist must be concerned not just with the records at the bottom of the pile, but with those that are added to the top as the pile grows inexorably. The main problems are those of organization, cataloguing and storage, and in dealing with those

problems the archivist should put himself in the position of a future historian undertaking research into any aspect of the College. This historian, for example, might wish to study the history of the membership examination and the views and membership of the Education Committee at a certain time. Not only must the records be preserved that can answer his questions, but he should be able to locate them with as much certainty and ease as possible. Only those who have undertaken research into the history of institutions can fully appreciate the sense of frustrated fury when records are disordered, uncatalogued, undated, and unidentifiable as to authorship; or, worst of all, destroyed, because someone of narrow vision decided they were "old stuff", no longer relevant.

This does not mean that all records are of equal value and that every scrap of paper must be preserved. Dinner menus, for example, are frequently preserved, although it is a matter of only limited historical interest whether the Inner Hebridean Faculty at their tenth anniversary dinner had trout or haggis or both. Original correspondence on important controversial matters, on the



other hand, especially when marked "personal and confidential" or, better still, "destroy after reading", are apt to be very important documents indeed. The organization of College records includes selection as well as the avoidance of unnecessary duplication.

Cataloguing, the second problem, is mainly a time-taking mechanical process in which it is vital to use an index system that marries in with that in use for current documents. The third problem, that of storage, is immensely difficult in a College already so crowded that space is more valuable than gold. The ideal—that the archives are granted a separate room with ample space and equipment—cannot be realized at present, and the archives are now stored in a dark narrow corridor in five filing cabinets, with some overflow onto the top and dustiest shelves of the College strong room. Some of the exist-