

The human factor

Returning to the clinic as the early sun illumined the blood-red rhododendrons we reflected together on what has become known as the human factor. This is a tepid phrase to describe the rock of human nature which shipwrecks many worthy plans and programmes. Hadn't I originally got to know this very family through a brother, nearly dead from septicaemia contracted through an injection of streptomycin for backache, administered by an untrained practitioner by a dirty needle and for financial gain?

Here as in Britain this human factor is crucial to each stage of health care delivery: the primary care team whose smooth working depends as much on shared laughter and mutual sympathy as on plans and programmes: the patient himself whose needs must be respected and dealt with before becoming fodder for statistics and surveys.

As health workers learn, surveys are done and clinics established we do well to remember that here as in the west the success of our programme depends ultimately on the human factor, or dare I say, on a divine solution?

References and Further Reading

1. Lee R. Chinese and Western medical care in China's rural communes. *World Health Forum* 1982; 3: 301.
2. Many analyses of the role of the village health worker have been written and village health manuals have been published in many countries. See for example *Primary health care and the village health worker*. Contact Special Series No 1 53. Geneva: Christian Medical Commission, 1979; and Wood E. *Community health workers' manual*. Nairobi: African Medical and Research Foundation, 1982.
3. Morley D. *Paediatric priorities in the developing world*. London: English Language Book Society and Butterworths, 1977.

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FROM THE FACULTIES

Smoking habits of doctors and their spouses in South East Scotland

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Earlier this year the South East Scotland Faculty Health Education Committee sent a questionnaire to all general practitioners in South East Scotland to ascertain how many of them still smoke, and especially how many still smoke cigarettes. It was hoped that the results would demonstrate to the public that doctors take the threat of cigarette smoking seriously.

THE questionnaire was sent out on three occasions until a reply had been received from 81 per cent of the 750 doctors written to (Tables 1 and 2).

117 (19 per cent) of doctors still smoke but only 36 (6 per cent) smoke cigarettes, the main cause of morbidity. It is interesting to note that 47 per cent of these doctors' spouses also smoke, while only 9 per cent of non-smoking doctors' spouses smoke. Although this can be readily understood the implications are important.

Pessimistically we had feared it likely that most of the doctors who did not respond to the three questionnaires were smokers, but an analysis of answers to the third questionnaire revealed a higher percentage of nonsmokers than in replies to either of the first two questionnaires. We therefore contend that the final figures are fairly accurate assessments of doctors' smoking habits.

General practitioners in this area do not smoke cigarettes as we believe that cigarette smoking harms health. The habit can be given up and we would ask all smoking doctors to consider if they could stop smoking. We suggest the idea of a sponsored stop, sponsored perhaps by your family, your partners or anyone else. The wider the net and the more people involved the more effective will be such a campaign.

I wish to acknowledge help received from the Health Education Committee with special thanks to Dr Lelia Watson and to the doctors who took the trouble to reply.

Table 1. Numbers of responders who do, do not or did smoke, and numbers of these doctors whose spouses smoke.

	Doctors	Doctors whose spouses smoke
Smokers	117 (19 per cent)	32 (27 per cent of 117 smoking doctors)
Nonsmokers	279 (46 per cent)	25 (9 per cent of 279 nonsmoking doctors)
Exsmokers	211 (35 per cent)	25 (17 per cent of 211 exsmoking doctors)
Total nonsmokers	490 (81 per cent)	50 (10 per cent of total nonsmoking doctors)
Total responders	607 (100 per cent)	82 (14 per cent of responders)

Table 2. Smoking preferences of doctors who smoke and numbers of these doctors whose spouses smoke.

	Doctors	Doctors whose spouses smoke
Cigarette smokers	36 (6 per cent of responders) (31 per cent of smokers)	17 (47 per cent of 36 cigarette smoking doctors)
Cigar/pipe smokers	81 (13 per cent of responders) (69 per cent of smokers)	15 (19 per cent of 81 cigar/pipe smoking doctors)