

Quite simply, faculties should be asked to suggest what *the minimum acceptable standards* of practice should be, bearing in mind the uneven spread of resources, manpower, demand and expectations that is so vividly described in the Black Report.¹ When this baseline has been established—and why should it not include new roles in the community for our specialist and nursing colleagues?—it would become both a target to aim for and something tangible to measure. Building, painstakingly, on such a foundation towards successively higher standards may take longer, but it is

more likely to be successful than starting from anywhere else.

Whether the collective list of personal 'weaknesses', which Council members will provide for us next summer, will get us going remains to be seen. I have my doubts—especially if those that they choose turn out to be of the same relative insignificance as the two cited by Dr Irvine. My guess is that, sheltered by anonymity, the faculties could produce something more useful.

As for quality, its essential inconsistency will continue to make it elusive. It is also likely that it will remain hidden from us all in the clouds of our

own personal and professional uncertainty about what is best for our patients. We must never stop thinking about quality but I am certain it would help greatly if we stopped trying to tell each other what it is.

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Reference

1. Townsend P, Davidson N. Inequalities in health. *The Black Report*. Penguin Books, 1982.

MEDICAL NEWS

Smoking related disease: symposium report

British family doctors could in one year persuade more than half a million patients to give up smoking.

This statement made by Dr G. H. Fowler expressed succinctly the overriding theme of a symposium held on 20 June at the College under the title: 'Smoking Related Disease: Intervention Better Than Cure?'

Dr John Horder, chairman of the symposium and immediate past-President of the College, pointed out that the general practitioner, in giving advice on smoking cessation, has a major opportunity to reduce the widespread nature of a number of serious disorders. This view was echoed by several speakers at the symposium, sponsored by Lundbeck in association with the College, which covered smoking related diseases, education and smoking cessation.

The effects of smoking were put into horrifying perspective by Dr Fowler when he commented that out of 1,000 young men who smoke cigarettes regularly, on average, one will be murdered, six will die on the roads and 250 will be killed before their time by tobacco.

The presentations examined the issue from a variety of angles:

- producing detoxified cigarettes and the problems with this if nicotine addiction is the reason for smoking.
- mounting successful mass campaigns to motivate people to try to give up.
- helping individual smokers to understand the needs met by each cigarette and so to develop a personal plan for stopping.
- extending the skills of nurses so that

they can contribute more help.

The symposium is part of a wider programme to encourage a positive attitude to intervention in smoking cessation amongst general practitioners. The College meeting preceded a series of workshops that are to be held around the UK. The first of these was held on 30 June at the Queen Elizabeth Postgraduate Medical Centre in Birmingham when 40 general practitioners took part in a special project to encourage them to see themselves in the role of smoking cessation counsellors. General practitioners from Dundee, Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff and Southampton will be able to take part in further groups in the series which is planned to start in the Autumn.

For more information on the smoking cessation workshop programme, contact Kate Winskill, Burson-Marsteller, 25 North Row, London W1.

Guide to Benefits for Handicapped Children and their Families

A revised edition of this book has been produced by the Disability Alliance Education and Research Association. It provides a clear introduction to the benefits available to handicapped children and their families and can be obtained from the Disability Alliance ERA at 25 Denmark Street, London WC2H 8NJ. (Tel: 01 240 0806). The booklet costs £1.20.

A Patient's Guide to the National Health Service

This book has been published by the Consumers' Association and Hodder & Stoughton in collaboration with the

Patients' Association. It is a guide to the NHS and explains all aspects of how to get inpatient or outpatient treatment and what to do if things go wrong. It covers such topics as how to choose your general practitioner, dentist and optician; maternity and child health services and all aspects of going into hospital. The roles of different health workers are described as are the mental health services. There is a chapter on services for the elderly.

The book is based on the wide range of queries and problems that people put to the Patients' Association. It is available from bookshops or The Subscription Department, Consumers' Association, Castlemead, Gascoyne Way, Hertford SG14 1LH—price £3.95.

Problems Afoot

Problems Afoot: Need and Efficiency in Footcare is a leaflet published by the Disabled Living Foundation. It shows how the footcare service of the NHS can be improved and made available to more people. It can be obtained from the Disabled Living Foundation (Sales) Ltd, Book House, 45 East Hill, Wandsworth, London SW18 2QZ, at £5.60 per copy (including postage and packing).

Well Being

The special *Well Being* programme 'Heart Attack' will go out on Channel 4 on Friday 11 November at 22.30. Its theme is prevention.

The first of a series of 10 new *Well Being* programmes will be shown in February 1984.

So much interest was generated by the programme on diabetes that a videotape of it is being produced for sale.