

NEWS AND VIEWS

Out-of-hours—a time for reflection

The monthly bulletins circulated with the *Journal* have certainly fired many members of the College to review their services offered to patients and to consider how these could be improved. It is interesting to reflect how long it might have taken those members who use deputizing services themselves to grasp the nettle and consider the standard of care given to patients during 'out-of-hours'. However it was not by doctors but by journalists and ultimately in Parliament itself that unpalatable facts were first aired.

THE COLLEGE response to the Minister's draft circular appears to have been wise and considered. Considerable time and effort has been spent in obtaining the views of members. Not only have the views from faculty boards been sought through faculty secretaries and Council representatives, but Bill Styles and Donald Irvine, Honorary Secretary and Chairman of Council, have themselves been made well aware directly of members' views.

The membership has received a draft circular from the General Purposes Committee of Council (GPC) together with a covering letter of explanation from Donald Irvine. It should be emphasized that this is only a draft circular. The issue of out-of-hours care for our patients and commercial deputiz-

ing services will be debated in Council on 10 March; only after this will the College make an informed reply to the Minister's proposals.

It would seem unlikely that the present situation with commercial deputizing services can remain totally unchanged, as at present covered under paragraph 19 of the Terms of Service for Doctors. The suggestion in the GPC draft circular to set up a working party involving government, patients and the profession to think through the problems in a period of calm seems eminently good sense.

In this context it is interesting to note that a recent press release (27 January) the College of Health, representing consumers' (i.e. patients') interests, has asked the Minister to reconsider his proposals for tightening up on the use

of deputizing services by general practitioners: 'The College has proposed to the Minister that, the issue being such a complex one, he should, before taking any action, set up a full enquiry into the services and involve patients from the beginning as well as undertaking an up-to-date survey to find out what patients' experience of the deputizing services has been.'

A working party would have to consider the fundamental questions—what do doctors really want; what do patients really want? The latter question may be more easily answered by our patients. The former has certainly caused difficulties for some faculty boards. It will be interesting to hear the debate in Council on 10 March.

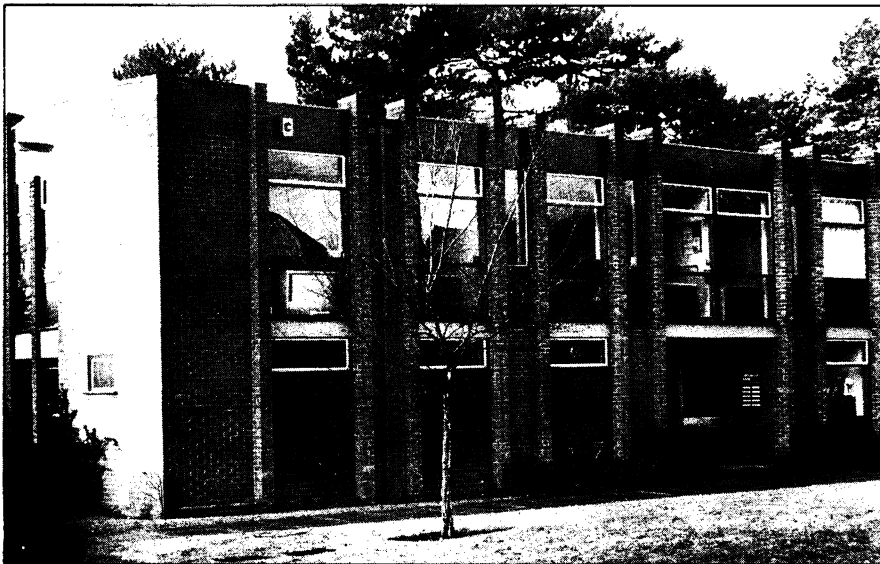
Michael Price

COLLEGE NEWS

The Research Division

Professor Michael Drury, Chairman of the Research Division Executive, reports on recent and present activities.

Research has always been one of the principal aims of the College. Sometimes it has been the initiation or support of a major national project, such as the oral contraception study or national morbidity studies, at other times encouraging or giving advice to individuals or small groups involved in research projects. From time to time the College has supported research fellowships or run courses. The results of its efforts are to be seen amongst the many papers published in scientific journals. In proportion, however, the amount of research emanating from general practice is small compared to all other clinical disciplines in this



The Birmingham Research unit occupies the first floor of this building, Lordwood House.