

or economic grounds. It is my firm belief that general practitioners should be 'nine to five' surgery doctors with out of hours cover provided by the general practitioners themselves or a competent deputizing service only for urgent medically indicated calls. It may be that your author would regard a visit to a coughing child as an emergency out-of-hours call, never mind a night call! I wonder how many of his colleagues in active practice would agree.

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Sir,

I was interested to read Dr Stevenson's letter on night calls (September *Journal*, p.496). I was interested to read of his support for objectivity. I remember listening to a lecture from Dr Stevenson when he attempted to justify his point of view with statistics in support of his policy in using the deputizing service. I was interested to hear in one of the lectures was that one of the problems was irritability in getting out of bed to do the night visits.

I feel that if he was interested in objectivity then he should have asked someone else without strong views to undertake the study of the advantages and disadvantages of the deputizing service.

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William Pickles lecture 1984

Sir,

I should like to support very strongly the opinions expressed by Dr Norell in his William Pickles lecture 1984 (August *Journal*, p.417).

He has made a clear and constructive criticism of the policies and activities of our College which my experience in general practice over a period of 35 years supports.

Before the War, which was a formative time for me, the object was, first of all, to produce a 'Safe Doctor'. This was the minimum aim but at the same time it was expected that by the inculcation of sound medical principles the practitioner would be able to adjust to new ideas and to become efficient in fresh medical circumstances in the future. Perhaps the pace of change was underestimated, but on the whole this aim was an effectively carried-out

process. It was also hoped that an enthusiasm for and belief in the value of medical practice would ensure continuing self-education and informed criticism of new developments in medicine. There were, of course, a proportion of practitioners who never caught their 'lifetime infection' of medical interest. At the same time the influence of our seniors, although we frequently disagreed with their views, remained a potent force. I think that we owe many of our present advantages and position in society to the passing on of traditional values, and this we should not forget.

Perhaps I was lucky, but I never felt the sense of defeatism in general practice, but carried on making what I could of it and feeling that this was possible for many others. Like Dr Norell I too have wondered what happened to trainees after Vocational Training. I am sure that we should have an investigation to assess the value of this process for practitioners when they are able to report their experiences. This would be more useful than testing them by the results of an examination, whose form is so hard to match to the real conditions and needs of practice. Perhaps we should allow the academic status of general practice to grow by means of our work and research in practice, rather than by conscious academic activities.

Dr Norell is undoubtedly right in stressing that thoughtfulness is a very important attribute of the doctor, who is judged by his human understanding as well as his technical competence; patients and consultants alike are well aware of this. Here we have a ready-made measure of our effectiveness and efficiency as practitioners, which can be measured by our peers. I am also doubtful whether true human understanding can be inculcated by psychological analysis.

Finally, Sir, may I say that I think it is a pity that our College motto is not that of the Hippocratic precept 'Where the love of man is, there also is love of this art'.

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Sir,

How refreshing it was to read Dr Jack Norell's lecture (August *Journal*, p.417). I should like to support his plea for the College to take a new look at its examination and also for it to encourage all general practitioners to take part in its educational activities.

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