

by way of the BMA, was asked to advise on the medical aspects of civil defence in this nuclear age. The report by acknowledged experts makes gloomy reading. They decided that under the weight of a nuclear attack, the medical services would collapse, and rapidly disappear completely. Only the most primitive forms of first aid would be available to any survivors. This means that all the schemes the Government has for defence against nuclear attack are a complete waste of time and money. Their suggestions are no more than a propaganda exercise, ostensibly to give the impression that our masters have the matter well in hand.

Among their mountains, the Swiss have made elaborate preparations for a nuclear war; these bomb shelters could well be successful, since, as a neutral, Switzerland would not be subjected to a direct nuclear attack and the shelters would work well against the fallout of bombs dropped at a distance. They would be quite useless in a country such as Britain, which would be saturated with bombs and rockets. There is just no defence against nuclear attack except disarmament. Doctors are by tradition healers, and in this situation they have a special duty to exert themselves to bring about the greatest challenge ever in preventive medicine, the abolition on all sides of this ghastly tool of mass destruction. For too long, most of us have buried our heads in the sand.

For centuries Christians have sought to define a just war, but there is no way in which a nuclear conflict can be made morally acceptable. All the Churches should unite to condemn such forms of warfare. This has been done by all the American Roman Catholic bishops. All denominations should follow the brave stand of the Quakers. The protagonists for increased armaments tell us that the only alternative to more and more nuclear weapons is a Russian take-over. This event is highly unlikely, but should it happen, that would be infinitely preferable to a nuclear war. We were overrun by the Romans and later by the Normans, but in the end we have emerged as a proud independent nation. Any foreign occupation would be preferable to a nuclear holocaust. Paul Oestreicher put it so clearly when he said that every tyranny has its day, it can never last for ever; but from the nuclear desert there is no way back.

Doctors must be positive and active in this matter. They must assist or if necessary cajole the politicians into finding methods for nuclear disarmament to take place on both sides of the Iron Curtain. If we just allow things to drift along as we are doing today, our intelligence, our superb technical skills, together with our moral bankruptcy and total inability to control armaments, will all combine to be the end of us. Maybe because of our arrogance and greed we deserve no better fate, but it seems a fearful thing that we should have the power to drag the rest of life on earth to destruction.

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What is Family forum?

Sir,

Family Forum was set up in 1980 as an alliance of family organizations. It aims to bring together people working with the family both at national and local level. Member organizations' particular interests range across the family life cycle from prenatal health to the care of the elderly. Their interests range, too, from the general, such as child health and the relations between schools and parents, to more specific areas of concern, such as the welfare of children in hospital.

At national level the Forum regularly holds conferences — the most recent highlighted the 'family dimension' of unemployment. It was attended by 131 delegates, of whom 54 were unemployed. A video film, made especially for the conference, showed the effects of long-term unemployment — emotional as well as financial — on four families in the Bath area. This was followed by brief statements from members of unemployed families and from people working in the caring agencies who were trying to help such families cope with debts, with mental illness and with the apathy and frustration which lack of work brings. Discussion groups focussed on the issues raised by the film and by these statements and brought together young people, wives and mothers, unskilled workers, skilled workers and professional people to share ideas and discuss strategies for coping with common problems.

Last winter, a conference on the topic of conciliation services was arranged jointly by Family Forum and four other organizations (Gingerbread, The National Family Conciliation Council, the National Marriage Guidance and One Parent Families). There had been considerable disappointment about the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Conciliation (The Booth Committee). The conference brought together people with wide-ranging interests who were concerned about the future of conciliation services, particularly out-of-court services. These included probation officers, solicitors, those working with children both in statutory and voluntary services, academics, representatives from churches and from family conciliation services across the country.

As a result of the conference a liaison group was set up and one of its members (Lisa Parkinson, NFCC) attended a meeting with the Lord Chancellor to put the case for a more thorough assessment of the value of out-of-court services. Shortly afterwards it was announced that two of the five services to be monitored by the Department were to be out-of-court services.

A very recent and continuing topic of concern has been the response of member organizations to the three government review bodies investigating social security benefits. A meeting was called to enable member organizations to find out at first hand what each other's response would be. Family Forum itself submitted general statements to each review committee stressing the need for a wider study of the benefit system as a whole and one which also included the income tax system. It outlined Family Forum's concern for a life cycle approach to benefits and

taxation which would provide adequately for the needs of the family at each stage of its development. The eventual introduction of a social wage would, the submission suggested, greatly benefit the unemployed and those dependent on very low pay or Supplementary Benefit.

Family Forum has six working groups which bring together individual representatives from its member organizations on a topic of common interest. At present, these groups are: International, Unemployment, Education for Parenthood, Resources over the Life Cycle, Family Fortnight, and Families of the Elderly and Handicapped People. This last group recently produced, in conjunction with Age Concern, a resource pack on services for the care of elderly and handicapped people. This aims to fill a gap in services for these two groups of people. Few families know all they could about the aids and services available, about the full range of social security benefits or about the variety of services provided locally both in and out of the home. The purpose of the pack is to stimulate the collection of information locally and to promote discussion as a basis for action in looking at existing services and setting up new ones. (Copies have been sent out to about 200 national organizations and local groups; copies are still available from the Family Forum Office.)

At local level Family Forum's role is that of catalyst. It was felt that in many areas there were already local 'umbrella' organizations for voluntary organizations and that it would be more appropriate for Family Forum to respond to local needs as requested. In Norwich, for example, a Brains Trust was arranged in conjunction with the local mothers' union on the topic of 'The family today'. In Manchester, a half-day conference is planned for the autumn on the health of those caring for handicapped or elderly people. A similar topic has been suggested as the Forum's input to a week of activity in Portsmouth on health care next summer.

The first two weeks of July this year were designated Family Fortnight. Local groups were encouraged to mark the event by drawing attention to the positive aspects of family life, to counteract in some small way the 'bad press' which the family sometimes receives. Family Fun-days were arranged in a number of towns, other groups held picnics, barbecues and family quizzes. Many churches held special family services and many local mothers' union groups arranged displays and exhibitions. In several towns local voluntary organizations got together to mount a large exhibition to show the public the work they do and, incidentally, to give their own workers a chance to meet their counterparts in other organizations. The highlight of the fortnight was an ecumenical family service held in London at St Martin-in-the-Fields on July 2nd — a celebration of the pleasures and the pains of family life.

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The Royal College of General Practitioners

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