

doors of the RCGP, not closing them. Chen suggests that the credibility of the RCGP could be raised by a higher examination pass mark. Our credibility both within the profession and with the general public lies with the job that we do and are seen to be doing. This is independent of the pass rate of the RCGP examination.

For those who so wish, there are plenty of exclusive clubs within medicine. For the RCGP to become another in order to establish the credibility of its members would defeat the object of its existence.

DANIEL TOEG

The Caversham Group Practice
Kentish Town Health Centre
2 Bartholomew Road
London NW5 2AJ

Counselling: scientific evidence needed

Sir,

I am interested and disturbed by the contrasts between the editorials in the *March Journal*. On page 119, Angela Coulter quite rightly calls for a 'coordinated attempt to gather scientific evidence' about fundholding. Fundholding was introduced for dogmatic political reasons by a government 'set against commissioning scientific evaluations'. In contrast on page 118, Anthony Hazzard, after reviewing studies of outcomes of counselling, says that '[studies] are unlikely to be conclusive' and sees a rationale for expanding counselling as 'people are increasingly asking for the... attention that qualified counsellors... provide'.

In *A critique of pure reason* (1781), Immanuel Kant showed that scientific reasoning cannot be applied to all things. Consideration of God and beauty requires more than analysis of the observer's sensations. In contrast, counselling is not a metaphysical concept. It is a worldly clinical process that aims to improve health, however widely defined. If studies are inconclusive, go back and try again.

Meanwhile, do not let us add another untested stress onto general practice, fuelled by supposed consumer demand. Let us wait for evidence to support counselling, not an editorial in the *March 2000 Journal* entitled 'Counselling: time for a cool appraisal'.

WAYNE LEWIS

Careg Wer Surgery
Blaenavon
Gwent

Patients who do not receive continuity of care

Sir,

Kieran Sweeney and Denis Pereira Gray's practice is awesomely organized, and they have identified a minority of Gray's patients who buck their system of personal lists (*March Journal*, p. 133). When compared with a control group matched for age and sex those who see doctors other than the one with whom they are registered have more social and psychological problems, and are more likely to make more use of alternative sources of primary care, to fail to attend appointments, and to be in social class 4 or 5 living in a council house.

The distribution of social class in the study group was not compared with that of Gray's list as a whole, nor was the social class of members of the study group used as a matching factor when selecting controls. It is not clear therefore whether the 'syndrome' of patients for whom the personal list does not seem to work (for whatever reason) includes or is associated with low socioeconomic class, or whether low socioeconomic class is a confounding factor. It would be instructive to compare the study group with a control group matched for social class as well as age and sex.

N STUART P HANDYSIDES

34a Villiers Street
Hertford SG13 7BW

Acute myocardial infarction

Sir,

I was interested in John Rawles' editorial concerning the general practitioner's role in early management of acute myocardial infarction (*April Journal*, p.171). He makes no mention of recommendations to advise at-risk middle-aged men to take aspirin for the classic symptoms of myocardial infarction or whether general practitioners should still carry aspirin for this purpose in the medical bag.

A 90-minute 'call to needle' time is not achievable in all cases, for even when arrival at hospital within this time limit is achieved, patients are often kept waiting. Of course, much will depend on the practice area and modes of transport available which differ widely in the United Kingdom.

If aspirin is given, does this interfere with thrombolytic therapy? If the general practitioner visits (adding to the time interval), a note will be made of the

administration of aspirin, but a patient may not be able to report self-medication if an arrhythmia has caused confusion.

In older patients there is the further problem of non-cardiac chest pain, for example, microvascular angina and midesophageal diverticula, in whom exclusion of coronary heart disease is not straightforward.

Some discussion of these practical difficulties would be valuable.

M KEITH THOMPSON

28 Steep Hill
Stanhope Road
Croydon CRO 5QS

Sir,

May I suggest some possible solutions to the problems outlined by John Rawles in his excellent editorial concerning the role of general practitioners in the early management of acute myocardial infarction (*April Journal*, p.171).

I had the great satisfaction of administering anistreplase on three separate occasions during the 1991-92 trial reported by Hannaford and colleagues (*April Journal*, p.175) with successful results, but have since experienced the frustration of watching subsequent supplies of anistreplase go to waste in the surgery fridge as they passed their expiry date, unused.

Given the increasing sophistication of the ambulance services and crews, is it not more sensible that anistreplase or its equivalent is carried on all suitably equipped ambulances and that the on-call general practitioner or ambulance control centre receiving a seemingly appropriate call for help immediately notifies the other so that they can meet at the patient's home?

The degree of coordination is not as difficult to achieve as it may seem, and in fact, was achieved in two of my three cases. In addition, both of these patients had also taken aspirin as instructed on the telephone before either I or the ambulance arrived. In one of these patients the early electrocardiograph changes present before anistreplase therapy had reverted to normal by the time the patient arrived at the hospital accident and emergency department four miles away. (The electrocardiograph results were passed on to Hannaford and colleagues). All three patients survive to this day.

Such coordination would need national and local agreements, but could be cost-effective and would result in less stress for the lone general practitioner faced with a patient suffering chest pain, and in better care for that patient.