

a certain extent. Therefore, we can no longer ignore the issues relating to alternative medicine, and research in these areas should be given greater emphasis.

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Clinical guidelines in primary care: a survey of general practitioners' attitudes and behaviour

Sir,

In his 1994 survey, Siriwardena found that GPs were generally in favour of clinical guidelines and thought they improved patient care (December *Journal* p.643). Our recent experience produced similar results.

We developed guidelines for the management of cervical chlamydia infection based on recommendations from the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre.¹ In 1994 and early 1995 we gave these guidelines to GPs and practice nurses in the 14 general practices near St George's Hospital that took part in a project to screen women for chlamydia infection. In January 1996 we sent a confidential questionnaire to all 53 GPs and 11 practice nurses in those practices, asking their opinion of these guidelines. If there was no response, we sent the follow-up questionnaire via the practice manager, who was asked to encourage the relevant GP or practice nurse to complete it.²

Eighty-three percent of the GPs and 72% of the nurses returned completed questionnaires. Seventy-six percent of respondents had received the guidelines and claimed to have read them, 14% could not remember and 10% had not received them (we omitted to ask if this was because they had only recently joined the practice). Eighty-four percent of respon-

dents found the guidelines easy to use and 81% said the guidelines had altered their clinical practice.

In addition, we asked whether practices would continue to screen women for chlamydia. The guidelines suggested that this should be considered for women aged under 35 years attending for speculum examination. Ninety-four percent of respondents said they would continue testing women for chlamydia. Indications included: vaginal discharge (94%); suspected pelvic inflammatory disease (92%); before IUCD insertion (46%); aged under 25 years and sexually active (35%); and before termination of pregnancy (20%).

Siriwardena observed that GPs often fail to follow systematic guidelines even when they are evidence-based. Moreover, responses to questionnaires may not accurately reflect what is carried out in practice. We are now analysing patients' records to see if our guidelines did lead to appropriate patient management.

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GPs' views of a new counselling service

Sir,

GP Care is a service being offered throughout five FHSAs to general practitioners (GPs) and their families, and involves both telephone and face-to-face counselling. The aim of this exploratory interim study was to assess GPs' beliefs about such a service and whether or not they would consider using it. This is part of a larger study, the results of which are yet to be published.

Fifty-seven GPs from five FHSAs were randomly selected using a quota sampling strategy and interviewed on the telephone about their beliefs concerning the GP Care service just prior to its commencement (Bedfordshire, *n*=11; Buckinghamshire, *n*=11; Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham, *n*=11; Hertfordshire, *n*=13; Berkshire, *n*=11). The sample was composed as follows: 70.2% male (*n*=40), 29.8% female (*n*=17), 91.2% full time (*n*=52), 8.8% part time (*n*=5), 93% in a group practice (*n*=53), 7% single handed (*n*=4) practitioners, 1.8% aged 20-29 (*n*=1), 44.6% aged 30-39 (*n*=25), 42.9% aged 40-49 (*n*=24), and 10.7% aged 50

Table 1. Beliefs about the new counselling service (numbers in parentheses)

Would GPs find a counselling service helpful?	No	Possibly	Yes	Don't know
In general?	0 % (0)	29.8% (17)	66.7% (38)	3.5% (2)
For work related problems?	12.3% (7)	36.8% (21)	49.1% (28)	1.8% (1)
For personal problems?	3.5% (2)	10.5% (6)	86 % (49)	0 % (0)
What factors would deter GPs from using the service?				
1/ Confidentiality		52.6% (30)		
2/ Professional pride		40.4% (23)		
3/ Not admitting that there's a problem		24.6% (14)		
4/ Not having faith in a counsellor		19.3% (11)		
5/ Not having the time		19.3% (11)		
6/ Embarrassment		15.8% (9)		
Would GPs prefer to talk to some on the telephone or face-to-face?				
Telephone	22.8% (13)	Face-to-face	61.4% (35)	Both 14% (8)
How would you feel about using the service?				
Would use	52.5% (30)	Might use	38.6% (22)	Would not use 8.8% (5)