WORDS AND MEANINGS

TS Eliot asks 'where is the knowledge we have lost in information?' perhaps a little disingenuously for someone for whom the precision of linguistic expression was so important. Good communication — the clear and unambiguous transmission of information by speech, writing, and other media, or by non-verbal means — is central to most human activities, not least the organisation and provision of health care. Clarity of expression, however, can hardly be provided without some degree of jargon. Policy papers are frequently littered with medical jargon, and, in particular, the politics of the NHS.

We also discuss three crucial aspects of health policy and the problems facing general practice and primary care in the UK: alternative funding models for the NHS, the future of the independent contractor status of GPs, and the huge challenge of making general practice a more attractive career option for medical students and new graduates. The arguments for and against co-payment are set out by Professors Les Toop, from the University of Otago, New Zealand, and Claire Jackson, University of Queensland, Australia, from whom we have much to learn about this topic. Although this discussion was never on the table before the general election, it is almost bound to surface again. A World Health Organization statement on ending the practice was published in 2008, but doing so is far from straightforward. An ill-judged prosecution, coming to court in London recently, failed, although it probably served to raise awareness of FGM. The new amendments to the Serious Crimes Act mandate reporting to the statutory services, but this in itself raises a number of potential difficulties for clinicians working in many settings, spelt out in the important contribution by Nigel Mathers and Janice Rymer.

Editor’s Briefing

REFERENCE


DOI: 10.3399/bjgp15X685093


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