WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST
From time to time our national love affair with the NHS needs a reality check. Health outcomes in the UK often fall short of those in many comparable Western European countries, and of what we would, ideally, wish. The focus recently has been on cancer survival figures which, despite protestations about different registration systems, do not tell an entirely happy story. Let’s hope that the new NICE guidance on early cancer diagnosis, which needs to be accompanied by better resources and better-integrated referral systems for GPs, makes a difference. Jon Emery and Peter Vedsted provide a valuable commentary on this important publication. This month, however, we focus attention on another contentious area of health care in the UK, that of mother and child health.

Our leading editorial by Judy Shakespeare and Marian Knight, on the UK Confidential Enquiry into Maternal Deaths, draws attention to the continuing toll of preventable maternal deaths in the UK, the majority of which are related to factors that should be identifiable, and either preventable or treatable. Although maternal mortality due to ‘direct’ factors, mostly thromboembolism, has fallen, two-thirds of deaths are due to ‘indirect’ causes such as cardiac problems, infections, other medical problems, and suicide, and this rate has not changed in recent years. Major recommendations emerging from the enquiry include that GPs recognise that flu immunisation of pregnant women is hugely important and that flu infections require appropriate, early treatment, and those who have been discharged from hospital following delivery treatment. There are useful updates on the diagnosis and management of Addison’s disease, on psoriasis and cardiovascular risk, and on the management of the peripartum.

In Out of Hours this month we are launching the BJGP Library. Each month we will feature a review of a favourite book, not necessarily medical, written by invitation but please feel free to offer suggestions for a future feature. We will feature a review of a favourite book, not necessarily medical, written by invitation but please feel free to offer suggestions for a future feature. We will feature a review of a favourite book, not necessarily medical, written by invitation but please feel free to offer suggestions for a future feature.

In a separate editorial Rohit Shankar and colleagues describe how the use of a safety systems for GPs, makes a difference: Jon Emery and Peter Vedsted provide a valuable commentary on this important publication. This month, however, we focus attention on another contentious area of health care in the UK, that of mother and child health.

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