

simply a 'psychosomatic disease' though this view seems to be widely held. It is probable that unrecognized biochemical changes underlie even some of the 'psychosomatic' cases.

Nakuru, Kenya

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Epidemiology of Collisions on the Road

Sir,

One can only applaud the fact that you should write your March editorial on the subject of road accidents. Any step which will help to cut the damage done is welcome: one such step is your statement "So long as the spread of diseases and death by vehicles on the road is thought and talked of as due to 'accidents' rather than to avoidable collisions little headway will be made . . ."

After that I fear that you fall foul of your own criticisms. You draw an analogy between the motor car and various infectious diseases: motor cars are not autonomous bodies like bacteria; they are controlled by human beings. The classical methods of epidemiology are bound to fail miserably because we are concerned with human actions and the motives for them—a subject which is clearly as distasteful to you as it is to many doctors.

We have to explain, for instance, why recently one make of car which had proved itself mechanically sound on the race-tracks of the world became statistically the most dangerous make of car in use when in the hands of English motorists. To come nearer to ourselves, Sir, we have to explain why sober, honest, conscientious people like doctors are often seen to ignore even the two most rudimentary safety measures—the red lights at cross roads and the speed limit. Answer this type of question and you will answer the question of why people put themselves in positions in which 'accidents' can happen.

A few of these 'accidents' are entirely caused by errors of judgment. One has only to watch road behaviour, however, to see that the vast majority are caused by errors of intention: it is greatly to the credit of the engineers that cars are good enough to allow foolish drivers to escape the consequences of their actions as often as they do. The techniques for the study of behaviour have already been developed in three fields—in psychology, particularly industrial psychology, in market research, and in criminology. Apply these techniques to behaviour on the road and we shall see the way to relief from the present burden.

One thing they have already shown and will continue to show is that some people are not suitable as drivers. Another is that certain types of car bring out the worst in their drivers. The Broad Street pump was chained up by John Snow to protect the public: doctors have applauded this action ever since. How loud will the applause be when some people, including a few doctors, find their cars (or themselves) chained up for the same reason?

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