recruit staff locally. We, and other mission hospitals, have a chronic staff shortage, particularly of senior staff. Salary scales at mission hospitals are delineated by Government, which, because it pays the subsidies, is in a position to "pay the piper and call the tune." Compliance with the existing state of affairs on the part of the mission hospitals does not necessarily imply acquiescence to the principles, or lack thereof, underlying the policies which have resulted in the differential salary scales.

While at present I cannot see any clear way in which nationalist policy can be changed in South Africa, except by education of those blinded by racial prejudice, I believe that the non-white population of South Africa would ultimately be the greatest losers as the result of any measure which reduced the inflow of medical personnel, particularly those with humanitarian motives who apply for posts here.

This letter expresses my personal views, and not necessarily those of other members of the staff of King Edward VIII Hospital or McCord Zulu Hospital, Durban. It would be interesting to know whether or not Dr. Dowling's views on medical isolation of South Africa reflect the attitudes of my non-white colleagues and friends with whom she came into contact—I doubt it.—I am, etc.,

J. K. McKECHNIE

Durban, S. Africa.

SIR,—I would like to urge you to consider seriously Dr. R. Hoffenberg's constructive suggestion (8 April, p. 111). Advertisements carried in the *British Medical Journal* for posts in South Africa—which seem to have become very large lately—are indeed misleading and liable to cause serious embarrassment to a proportion of your readers.

South Africa must surely be the only country in the world where doctors are paid according to the degree of pigmentation of their skin. There are countries which discriminate against non-nationals, but the Provincial Administrations in South Africa offer better conditions of service to foreign immigrants if they are white than to South Africans if they are brown.

Advertisements for medical posts in South Africa should state unequivocally: (1) Whether the post is intended for a white doctor or a brown doctor or for either. For example, no coloured, Indian, or African doctors work on the wards at Groote Schuur Hospital, the main teaching hospital of Cape Town University, although more than half the patients are not white. (2) Where a post could be held by a doctor of any colour, the salaries for white, coloured, and African doctors should be clearly written down.

If you were to insist on this, Sir, you would surely be helping to stop a situation about which your counterpart the editor of the *South African Medical Journal*, writing within the country, recently concluded: "there must come a change, for we can no longer tolerate the situation."¹—I am, etc.,

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¹ *South African Medical Journal*, 1971, 45, 541.

attention to the fact that our black colleagues in South Africa receive only 70% of the pay given to white doctors for doing the same job.

This is something that concerns us all, and we should certainly urge the Editor of the *B.M.J.* to carry no advertisements for medical posts in South Africa without ascertaining that the terms offered for the post are not dependent on the applicant's colour.—I am, etc.,

YOLANDE FRIEDL

London S.E.1

Imipramine in Pregnancy

SIR,—Dr. D. L. Crombie and others' letter (18 March, p. 745) based on the 1964 study on the outcome of pregnancy in England and Wales prompted us to review the data of a similar study in Scotland. This was organized by the Royal College of General Practitioners in 1965-7 and co-ordinated by Dr. Norman Dean, then at the Usher Institute, University of Edinburgh. All medication, whether prescribed by her own doctor or taken on her own initiative during the period from six weeks before until the end of pregnancy, together with morbidity, was recorded for each mother in approximately 15,000 pregnancies.

There were 17 mothers for whom imipramine was prescribed, all (except one) within the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. No abnormalities were reported in 14. One patient aborted at 14 weeks. Two patients were reported to have given birth to a child with congenital abnormalities: one had defective abdominal muscles and possible abnormality of gut, the other was subsequently discovered to have a diaphragmatic hernia.

Of 31 mothers for whom amitriptyline was prescribed no abnormality was reported in 28. One mother aborted at six weeks, there was one stillbirth, and one child was born with hypospadias.

These findings from the Scottish study, taken in conjunction with the results reported by Dr. Crombie and colleagues, do not suggest that the antidepressants mentioned are associated with a high risk of fetal abnormality.—We are, etc.,

E. V. KUENSSBERG

Recorder,
Scottish Outcome of Pregnancy Study

J. D. E. KNOX

Honorary Director,
Scottish General Practitioner Research Support Unit
University of Dundee,
Department of General Practice,

Congenital Absence of Carpal Scaphoid

SIR,—A man 22 years of age presented himself to the accident department of Leicester Royal Infirmary complaining of pain in the left wrist as a result of a fall on the outstretched hand. On clinical examination the obvious abnormality was an obliteration of the snuff-box by swelling and some tenderness over this area. Routine x-rays showed what appeared to be an absence of the carpal scaphoid. The man was found to have a full range of wrist movement, no deformity, normal muscle power, and intact sensation. Movements of the fingers were free. In view of the tenderness and swelling over the radial side of the wrist joint, the condition was

diagnosed as a sprain. A crepe bandage was applied and he was instructed to resume his work as soon as the pain subsided. There was no previous history of injury or operation.

Radiological examination confirmed that the left carpal scaphoid bone was absent. The rest of the carpal bones were normal in appearance and anatomical relationship. No bony injury was detected. The opposite wrist was x-rayed and this showed a normal-looking carpus. (Fig.)

Three and a half months later the patient was reviewed again and he stated that his symptoms had subsided two or three days after the injury and he was able to carry on his work as a lorry driver without difficulty.

There were no symptoms of congenital absence of the carpal scaphoid prior to a minor sprain. The absence of this bone would not appear to have affected the strength of the wrist nor produced any distortion of the normal carpal relationships. A search through the literatures has failed to reveal an example of this condition, although abnormalities in the carpus in which the scaphoid has been absent but associated with such conditions as flail thumb or absence of the thumb have been described.¹⁻⁵

We would like to thank Mr. R. C. J. Hill and Mr. M. McLearie for their guidance and advice.

—We are, etc.,

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M. A. HADDADIN

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- 1 Barsky, A. J., *Congenital Anomalies of the Hand and their Surgical Treatment*. Springfield, Thomas, 1958.
- 2 Davison, E. P., *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, 1962, 44-B, 816.
- 3 Hanley T., and Conlon, P. C., *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, 1957, 39-B, 458.
- 4 Hodgeson, A. R., *British Journal of Surgery*, 1943, 31, 95.
- 5 Jones, F. Wood, *The Principles of Anatomy as Seen in the Hand*, 2nd edn., London, Baillière, Tindall and Cox, 1941.

Coalminers' Pneumoconiosis

SIR,—Dr. J. P. Lyons and his colleagues (18 March, p. 713) have reported some further results on their group of deceased miners and ex-miners, most of whom had suffered from pneumoconiosis during life. Their earlier study (29 August, 1970, p. 481) was criticized on the grounds that a sample of deaths occurring within a fixed period need not be representative of the total population in which these deaths have occurred (17 October 1970, p. 176; 31 October 1970, p. 305). It is regrettable, but not surprising, that this criticism has not been answered in their more recent paper. We say it is not surprising because it was clear from their letter (5 December 1970, p. 623) that they regarded it as totally irrelevant. They