perfusion, and consequent disability, without reducing the FEV. Therefore disability produced by simple pneumoconiosis may not only be masked by an unequal distribution of chronic bronchitis, but the tests that have been relied on to look for it are particularly insensitive.

This argument may be rejected because there is little or no evidence that chronic bronchitis is less common in miners with higher categories of simple pneumoconiosis than in those without. Because, during life, chronic bronchitis has to be diagnosed on the presence of symptoms and because it has been convincingly shown⁴ that simple pneumoconiosis itself produces the same symptoms (even when smoking habits are taken into account) there are enormous difficulties in determining the distribution of chronic bronchitis in miners. The same investigation⁴ showed that the presence of simple pneumoconiosis was associated strongly with a complaint of breathlessness. This again would be expected with small-airways or alveolar disease and this seems a more logical explanation than an assumption that the men complained of breathlessness because many were aware that they had pneumoconiosis.

Satisfactory information about the distribution of chronic bronchitis in miners can probably come only from careful postmortem bronchial histology. Some attempt at this was made by Lyons *et al.*⁵ but their series did not include enough subjects without pneumoconiosis to achieve valid conclusions. I have a very strong clinical impression that severe chronic bronchitis, characterized by the "blue bloater," is seldom if ever seen in a man with category 3.

Unequal distribution of chronic bronchitis may also conceal a reduction in life expectancy due to simple pneumoconiosis. Dr. Cochrane's table III gives a little support for this view. Below the age of 45 there is somewhat higher mortality in men with simple pneumoconiosis. In these younger men there should be less bronchitis and thus less "protection" from the development of pneumoconiosis. Mortality would then be a better reflection of the effect of simple pneumoconiosis. Between 45 and 65 years mortality is considerably higher in men with category O than in those with simple pneumoconiosis and this may be due to an excess of bronchitis in the former group.

I believe Dr. Cochrane's conclusions should be qualified by adding that the distribution of chronic bronchitis in miners is probably uneven. Because of the marked effect this has on conventional ventilatory tests and on mortality, uneven distribution may well mask substantial disability and mortality produced by higher categories of simple pneumoconiosis. As someone who tries to avoid being emotionally stirred by a number of dots on x-rays, I still find it impossible, when looking at microscopical and paper-mounted sections of lungs with extensive simple pneumoconiosis, to believe that it has no significant effect on a man's capacity to breathe comfortably and to live to an old age. There are, of course, other ways in which simple pneumoconiosis can produce disability⁶⁻⁷ which have not been touched on here or by Dr. Cochrane.—I am, etc.,

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	Non-Miners	Miners			
		Cat. 0	Cat. 1	Cat. 2	Cat. 3
Number	100	100	100	100	100
No. with bronchitis	20	45	40	25	10
Ventilatory score for non-bronchitics	8,400	5,500	5,700	6,750	7,650
Ventilatory score for bronchitics	1,400	3,150	2,600	1,500	550
Total ventilatory score	9,400	8,650	8,300	8,250	8,200

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Prodromal Symptoms of Biliary Colic or Cholecystitis

SIR,—Prodromal symptoms are such as may occur in the time immediately preceding a more serious disease. On 3 and 4 April 1969 I suffered an acute attack of cholecystitis for which the gall-bladder was successfully removed. During the six months preceding this acute attack I had suffered some symptoms which puzzled me and my doctor and which I mentioned in a short article published in the *B.M.J.* (18 July 1970, p. 147).

These prodromal symptoms occurred at intervals of one to three weeks. The first attack was in about September 1968. I had got to sleep about ten o'clock and woke suddenly a few hours later; I had no pain but I was sweating profusely and my heart was beating about twice its normal rate. I sat up in bed wondering what had caused these symptoms, but since they gradually subsided I took little notice of them. But soon they became frequent enough to cause me to have a towel by my bedside to dry myself if an attack occurred. My doctor examined me thoroughly but could find no cause for the symptoms, but on the night of 9-10 February 1969 I had a more severe attack and rang the bell to my sister's room (she is a qualified nurse) and since I was unable to get on the telephone to my own doctor I phoned my sisters' doctor, who gave me good advice, told me to take my usual hypnotic, and the attack passed off. There was no pain at any time, but the awakening was so sudden that it must have been due to some unascertainable cause.

Then on 3 April I had the acute attack of cholecystitis which I described in my published account. The gall-bladder was already necrotic in some places and when it was removed and opened was found to contain 15 pigmented gall-stones (black pigment). There was no stone which could possibly have passed into the cystic duct but all the stones were irregular in shape and rather flattened, and two of them had each of them at one end a smooth rounded quarter-inch that made it quite certain that they had attempted to enter the cystic duct. Neither of them could

have got far into the duct but I came to the conclusion that their attempted entry into the duct may have been the direct cause of the sweating and the increase in heart rate. At the same time I could not with assurance say that they had caused the symptoms and I have waited four years before I give my opinion that my suggestion was correct, for I have not had any similar attack since the operation was performed.

It is well known that reflexes from the gall-bladder can cause symptoms which can call attention to the heart rather than the gall-bladder and copious sweating could easily be caused reflexly through the sympathetic nerves. The absence of pain can be explained by the fact that I sat up immediately when awakened and the stone would at once fall away from the neck of the gall-bladder. I have never seen any reference to similar prodromal attacks, nor have I heard any mention of them, so they are either very rare or have been overlooked. I am writing this note so that the readers of the *B.M.J.* may be on the look out for any such similar prodromal symptoms.—I am, etc.,

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The Problem Oriented Medical Record

SIR,—One of the major benefits of Professor Lawrence Weed's system of problem oriented medical records which was described by Dr. Neil McIntyre (9 June, p. 598) is the structuring of the clinical data which ensues from it. As the structuring of data is one of the more difficult parts of the design of any system for making inter-patient comparisons, particularly if a computer is involved, it is not surprising to find that one has been used as a vehicle for Professor Weed's record.

May I appeal to those interested in this system, however, not to associate too closely the ideas of problem oriented medical records and the use of a computer to collect and process these records. As you say in your leading article in the same issue (9 June, p. 570), a lot of research is still needed in the application of computing techniques in medicine. Professor Weed's ideas can undoubtedly be applied with great benefit to existing medical data; and should a successful system "pencil and paper" methods of recording of computer-based problem oriented records not be achieved as rapidly as we would wish, it is important that the potential benefits of the problem oriented approach should not be discarded because of difficulties inherent in the application of today's technology in medical environments.—I am, etc.,

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Hospital Medicine Sheets

SIR,—It is surprising that after 20 years of the National Health Service no standard form of hospital medicine prescription sheet has become generally acceptable and applicable.

At the present time different hospital groups, and their separate hospitals in some instances, have their own specially designed and printed sheets. This involves unnecessary