

From the BMA

Student survey shows opposition to loans

The majority of respondents to a questionnaire sent to medical student members of the BMA oppose the government's proposals for top up loans for students in higher education. Just over half said that the proposal would not have affected their decision to study medicine supposing they were due to start a course in October 1988, but nearly one third of students studying in London said that they would have chosen a course outside London.

The questionnaire was dispatched with the annual report of the BMA's medical students group and there were 500 replies. Although only 3.6% of respondents said that they would have decided not to go to university at all, a further 15.2% said that they would have delayed going to university in order to earn some money.

Respondents who said they would choose a course lasting only three years (14.6% of the total or 73) were asked which subject they would have chosen. About two thirds of the respondents would have chosen a subject that was either closely related to medicine or in the basic or applied sciences.

There was considerable variation between the responses from men and women about the effect of the proposals, with a higher proportion of women reporting that their decision would have been affected in some way. Of respondents studying in London, 38% of women said that they would have chosen a course outside London compared with 26% of men. Of those studying outside London, 26% of the women said that they would have delayed going to university to earn some money. A greater proportion of those who came from families where the breadwinner was in a manual occupation said that they would have been likely to abandon going to university or would have chosen a course lasting only three years.

At a press conference on 13 November the chairman of the medical students group committee, Mr Keith Reid, said that students entering a London medical school in 1990 would have a loan of £4144 to pay off and £3692 if they trained in a provincial medical school. This was on top of any overdrafts; at present the average overdraft for fifth year medical students was £1072. Furthermore, clinical students had on average four weeks' holiday a year and unlike students on other courses could not easily take vacation jobs. The students have had meetings with the Labour party, which is committed to abolishing the loans scheme.



University of Manchester Medical School, where the chairman of the BMA's medical students group committee, Mr Keith Reid, is in his final year

NHS indemnity scheme

Earlier this month the new Minister for Health, Mrs Virginia Bottomley, announced that health authorities would take financial responsibility for the negligent acts of their employees—that is, doctors in hospital and community health services—from 1 January 1990 (11 November, p 1181). The Department of Health has now written to the chairman of the BMA council reminding doctors that they are contractually obliged to continue to subscribe to a medical defence organisation until 31 December and that, subject to certain conditions, authorities should reimburse two thirds of the subscriptions. The department's letter to Dr J H Marks is reproduced here.

You will wish to be aware that the Minister for Health has today announced that from 1 January 1990 health authorities will take financial responsibility for the negligent acts of their medical and dental staff in the course of their NHS employment. Health authorities are vicariously liable for the negligence of their employees, but at present medical and dental staff are covered through their subscriptions to a medical defence organisation.

The health departments consulted health authorities and others about this proposed indemnity scheme earlier this year and on 25 July the then minister for health announced the government's intention to introduce the new arrangements with effect from 1 January 1990. The new arrangements will apply to claims for damages (in respect of negligent acts) which were initiated before 1 January 1990 as well as to new claims; this assumption of financial responsibility for existing claims is subject to agreement with the medical defence organisations on the allocation of part of their reserves to meeting the liabilities which will be taken over by health authorities. The new

arrangements will apply to the hospital and community health services only.

Until 31 December 1989 medical and dental staff remain contractually obliged to subscribe to a recognised defence organisation, and subject to certain conditions health authorities should reimburse two thirds of the subscriptions. There is some evidence that some practitioners have not renewed their subscriptions in the expectation of the introduction of the indemnity scheme. We have therefore asked health authorities to take steps as necessary to remind their medical and dental staff of their contractual obligation and of the possible consequences of not having cover. Whilst a health authority would be financially responsible after 1 January 1990 for negligence occurring in the course of NHS employment, it would not provide cover for non-hospital and community health service work.

The department will in due course issue more detailed guidance to health authorities on the operation of the new arrangements, including the handling of both existing and new claims.

Calling police surgeons

A one week course for police surgeons within six months of appointment and those appointed from a future date will be held next year from 18 March at the police training centre, Brandshill, Surrey. The council of the Association of Police Surgeons of Great Britain took the decision to run the course after discussions between the association and the BMA. Doctors who are interested in taking part should apply to their local chief constable or to the chairman of the training committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers, Mr A R Bourlet, assistant chief constable, South Wales Police Headquarters, Cowbridge Road, Bridgend, Glamorgan CF31 3SU.

New NHS organisation proposed

The National Association of Health Authorities and the Society of Family Practitioner Committees are consulting their members about proposals from a joint working party to set up a new organisation which would represent the interests of family practitioner committees, health authorities, and self governing hospital trusts in the light of the changes proposed in the government's white paper *Working for Patients*. Key tasks for the new organisation would be

- To communicate the views of all its members at a national level
- To act on a consultancy basis on behalf of its members
- To help promote a positive image of the NHS and its managing organisations
- To act as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas on good practice
- To help chairmen and members of authorities in carrying out their responsibilities.

The councils of both existing organisations are backing the proposals and if the initial plan wins general support a final version will be circulated next year and family practitioner committees and health authorities will vote on the proposals at an extraordinary general meeting.

Independent liver transplant unit in London

London now has its own liver transplant unit. Last month King's College Hospital, London, which in the past has been jointly designated with Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, was recognised as an independent centre. The existing clinical links between the two centres are expected to continue. The other designated units are at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, and St James's University Hospital, Leeds.

Yellow bag code for clinical waste

In a typical London borough of 150 000 people 3000 bags of clinical waste and 50 boxes of used needles are collected each week. The London Waste Regulation Authority has issued *Guidelines*

for the Segregation, Handling, and Transport of Clinical Waste, which recommend that

- All segregated clinical waste should be accompanied by documentation
- Health authorities should have a designated officer for waste control
- Landfill techniques should not be used
- Waste should be incinerated in environmentally acceptable regional plants.

Clinical waste in London is collected in yellow bags and the regulation authority wants the yellow bag code to be practised not only by the medical profession but by everyone who handles clinical waste—beauticians, tattooists, veterinary surgeons, dentists, and diabetics who treat themselves. To help staff training the regulation authority has produced a video *Follow the Yellow Bag Code*. Details of the guidelines and the video may be obtained from the London Waste Regulation Authority, County Hall, London W1 (01 633 2854).

Christmas lectures for young people

The following holiday lectures for young people will be given at the Royal College of Surgeons:

"What's in a smile?" by Mr R C Parkhouse, Monday 18 December, 3 pm.

"Sensible insensibility: anaesthesia yesterday, today, and tomorrow," by Dr J C Stoddart, Tuesday 19 December, 3 pm.

"Get a head surgery," by Mr Jason Brice, Wednesday 20 December, 3 pm.

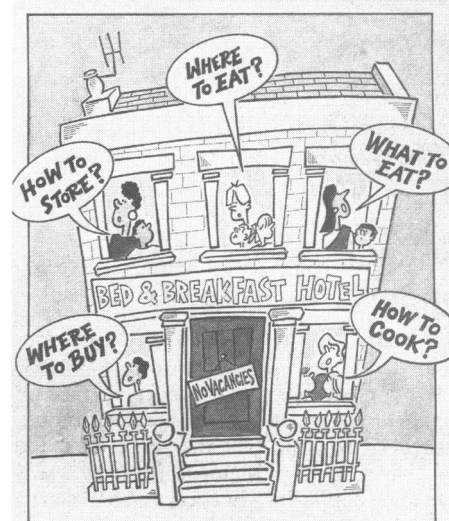
"So you want to be a surgeon?" by Mr A W F Lettin, Thursday 21 December, 3 pm.

Applications for tickets should be sent to the Hunterian Institute Office, Royal College of Surgeons, 35-43 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3PN, with a stamped addressed envelope.

Taking care of musicians

Between 5% and 10% of orchestral players are off work for longer than one month each year according to a survey carried out by the Association of British Orchestras. The concern that this has caused has led to the establishment of the Association of Medical Advisers to British Orchestras. Doctors who have an interest in music

Living in Bed & Breakfast?



WHAT CAN WE EAT?

How can I eat a healthy diet on take away food? How can I manage with so little money? Where are the local shops and the best buys? How can I prepare nutritious meals without a kitchen? To answer these questions the Bayswater Families Care Team, Parkside Health Authority, has produced "What Can We Eat?" for people living in bed and breakfast accommodation and other homeless families. The booklet is available from Parkside Health Promotion Department, Green Lodge, Barrets Green Road, London NW10

will be trained by a panel of experts and then given an honorary appointment to an orchestra. All training and out of pocket expenses will be met. Doctors who are interested in such appointments and who live reasonably close to Belfast, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, or Newcastle upon Tyne are invited to write to the acting chairman of the new association, Dr Ian James, Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, Hampstead, London NW3 2QG. Nearly 100 doctors have already expressed an interest and the association hopes to expand its services beyond the major orchestras.

COMING EVENTS

Medical Women's Federation London Association—Symposium "Women and health care . . . into the 1990s," 25 November, London. Details from the meetings secretary of the association, Hilary Thomas, 88 Ockendon Road, London N1 3NW.

British Medical Association choir—Carol service, Tuesday 19 December, 1.15 pm, St Pancras Church, near BMA House. All welcome. Collection for charity.

Institute of Dental Surgery—Course "Basic research methods for surgeons," 3-6 January 1990, London. Details from Ms Pat Johnson, Eastman Dental Hospital, 256 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8LD. (Tel 01 837 3646 ext 2044.)

United Kingdom Drug Utilisation Research Group—National meeting, 5 January 1990, London. Details from Kathryn Griffiths, Wolfson Building, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham B15 2TH. (Tel 021 472 1311 ext 4511.)

King's College Hospital—Multi-disciplinary symposium "Breast feeding," 17 January 1990, London. Details from the School of Midwifery, Normanby College, King's College

Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS.

Nutrition Society—Details and copies of the 1990 calendar are available from the programmes secretary, Dr A M Prentice, Dunn Nutrition Unit, Milton Road, Cambridge CB4 1XJ.

University of Dundee Centre for Medical Education—Details and copies of the March and April programme of courses for medical and paramedical teachers are available from the centre, Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee DD1 9SY. (Tel 0382 60111 ext 3090.)

BMA NOTICES

*Members proposing to attend meetings marked * are asked to notify in advance the honorary secretary concerned.*

Division Meetings

Ayrshire and Arran—At Halfway House, Wednesday 22 November, 7 for 7.30 pm, joint meeting with the Ayrshire Veterinary Association on ultrasound, speakers Dr Jack Boyd and Dr Brian Stanton. * (Followed by dinner.)

Brighton—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, Cuckfield Hospital, Wed-

nesday 22 November, 8.15 pm, joint meeting with the Sussex Veterinary Society "Bovine spongiform encephalopathy: transmissible encephalopathy in man," speakers Mr J W Wilesmith and Professor C A Mims. * (Preceded by buffet supper 7.15 for 7.30 pm. *)

Bromley—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, Farnborough Hospital, Friday 14 November, 8 pm, Burgundy wine tasting followed by buffet supper. * (Guests invited.)

Dartford, Gravesend, and Medway—At Boardroom, St Bartholomew's Hospital, Rochester, Monday 20 November, 8.15 pm, agm.

East Kent—At San Clu Hotel, Ramsgate, Thursday 23 November, 7.30 for 8 pm, medicolegal dinner with Isle of Thanet Law Society, speaker Sir John Wilton. (Guests invited.)

East Surrey—At John Sowerbutts Postgraduate Medical Centre, Redhill Hospital, Tuesday 21 November, 7.30 pm, wine tasting. * (Buffet provided. Guests invited.)

Forth Valley—At Powfoulis Hotel, by Airth, Friday 24 November, 7.30 for 8 pm, annual dinner, guest speaker Mr Sam Galbraith MP. * (Medical guests invited.)

Guildford—At Post House Hotel, Thursday 23 November, 8 pm, dinner

meeting, speakers Mr Robin Gray and Dr S P Williams: "Medical indemnity." *

Gwynedd—At British Hotel, Bangor, Wednesday 22 November, 7.30 pm, general meeting.

Leeds—At Headingley Pavilion, St Michael's Lane, Headingley, Tuesday 21 November, 7.30 for 8 pm, dinner, speakers Dr John Marks and Mrs Pamela Taylor. * (Members of neighbouring divisions invited. *)

Londonderry Subdivision—At White Horse Inn, Friday 24 November, 7.30 for 8 pm, annual dinner, guest speaker Mr Tim Albert. * (Guests invited.)

Mid-Northumberland—At Black Close, Ashington, Thursday 23 November, 8 pm, invitation from John and Beatrice Noble to a wine tasting. *

Northallerton—At Sundial Hotel, Northallerton, Thursday 23 November, 7.45 for 8.15 pm, divisional dinner, speaker Dr I Field. * (Guests and members of Harrogate Division invited.)

Norwich—At Teaching Centre, Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, Thursday 23 November, 6.30 for 7 pm, joint meeting with Med Chi and NANIME "Medicine 2000," speakers Dr Simon Downs and Mr

Simon Crocker. * (Followed by buffet supper. *)

Perth and Kinross—At Board Room, Perth Royal Infirmary, Wednesday 22 November, 7.30 pm, business meeting.

Peterborough—At Postgraduate Centre, Peterborough District Hospital, Wednesday 22 November, 7.30 pm, agm.

Southend on Sea—At Garon's No 1 Banqueting Suite, Friday 24 November, 7.30 for 8 pm, annual dinner dance. * (Guests invited.)

Wakefield and Pontefract—At Postgraduate Centre, Pontefract Infirmary, Friday 24 November, 7.30 pm, "Champagne" evening and buffet supper. *

Waltham Forest—At Medical Education Centre, Whipps Cross Hospital, Wednesday 22 November, 8.30 pm, joint meeting with Medical Education Centre, speaker Dr Fay Hutchinson: "Oral contraception: whose choice?" (Preceded by buffet supper, 7.30 pm. * Recognised under Section 63.)

West Norfolk and Wisbech—At Postgraduate Lecture Theatre, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn, Thursday 23 November, 7.30 pm, agm.