

Discussion

The SARS outbreak provided a unique opportunity to explore the impact of an emerging health threat on medical professionalism. Overall the participants thought that physicians exhibited professionalism, though they witnessed several examples of strained professional behaviour. These examples highlight aspects that medical educators should address. Firstly they need to explore the balance between the clinician's personal safety and the needs of the patients. These discussions should occur explicitly and early in the training process.³ Secondly, clinicians should be encouraged to consider the interests of colleagues to enhance professional respect and collaboration. Thirdly, during similar outbreaks, research must be carried out and clinicians who are caring for the patients should have the opportunity to participate fully. Fourthly, while professional values should be incorporated from the onset of the clinical career it should be described as an ideal to be constantly pursued. Finally, it has been suggested that a good way to teach professionalism is through role modelling,⁴ and those serving as role models need detailed knowledge of professionalism.³

The observation that there were instances of strained professional behaviour is not surprising.^{5,6} SARS presented the healthcare system with a new potentially catastrophic risk over which physicians believed they had little control and it aroused fear.

Limitations and strengths to the study

There are limitations to this study. Firstly, this study included only clinicians from university affiliated institutions. These institutions provided care for almost half of the patients affected with SARS during the initial outbreak in Toronto. Their experiences may not reflect those of physicians working elsewhere. Secondly, we included only physicians and cannot describe the experiences of other healthcare professionals. However, nurses and support staff were the predominant participants in another study that found similar results.⁷

While several studies have explored the experiences of clinicians during the initial experience with HIV,⁸⁻¹⁰ there is little other rigorous qualitative literature on the impact on professionalism of caring for patients with serious infectious diseases. Moreover, this study was completed during a rapidly emerging crisis and therefore we were able to capture physicians' reflections in the immediate setting.

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Corrections and clarifications

BMJ cover page, 29 May 2004

On the front cover of the General Practice issue of the *BMJ* of 29 May 2004, we published a headline that wrongly said that soya may increase the risk of endometrial cancer. This is quite the reverse of the message of the paper by Wang Hong Xu and colleagues that this related to (pp 1285-8). The authors had found that soya intake is associated with a reduced risk of endometrial cancer.

Can the new "electronic highway" for the NHS have a smooth launch?

Some IT literate readers may have been confused by our description in this news article by Geoff Watts of the new national "N3" broadband network due to replace the existing NHSnet (15 May, p 1156). We said that N3 will be run by five local suppliers. This is wrong; N3 will be run by one "integrator," BT. The five local service providers will be responsible for delivering a full range of IT services to the NHS in a specified locality.

Spending on neglected diseases has increased, says report

In this news article by Fiona Fleck (22 May, p 1220), we summarised a report from the Global Forum for Health Research but inadvertently referred to the organisation as the Global Fund for Health Research.

What next for electronic communication and health care?

We gave the wrong journal title in reference 9 of this editorial by Alejandro R Jadad and Tony Delamothe (15 May, pp 1143-4). The correct reference is: Skinner H, Biscope S, Poland B, Goldberg E. How adolescents use technology for health information: implications for health professionals from focus group studies. *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 2003;5(4):e32. The full text is freely available at www.jmir.org/2003/4/e32/

Obituary: Jean Ginsburg

We wrongly stated in the obituary of Jean Ginsburg by Caroline Richmond (29 July, p 1321) that it was her daughter to whom she gave birth while doing circulation monitoring for research; it was in fact her younger son, Andy.