Laparoscopy is now accepted all over the world as a valuable, even brilliant, diagnostic and operative technique. However, the laparoscopist must possess the proper instruments, and must have been fully trained. Let us not confuse its limitations with those of the operator. If I may draw a parallel, the fact that some gynaecologists are not much good at removing the uterus by the vaginal route does not make vaginal hysterectomy a bad operation.

Laparoscopic sterilization in trained hands is a safe, rapid, simple procedure which should be minimal in its occurrence to patients of only a few hours.—I am, etc.,

Patrick Steptoe
Oldham, Lancs

Smallpox Vaccination

Str.—Surely the herd immunity that we now have is what it has always been about. To give up this as is now contemplated, and at a time when air travel spreads disease so easily, is Heretic. The Department of Health and Social Security are to be congratulated with a Health Trends1 recently claiming the whooping cough was down to almost zero when general practitioners were having fewer and fewer cases. At least I was. Was it a virus in persitans clothing? Has not the spread of cholera to Africa and Europe not been a warning? Who will take the blame when we suffer a smallpox epidemic in the next ten years?—I am, etc.,

SYDNEY DAVIES
Belfast

1 Health Trends, 1970, 2, 77.

Str.—Professor George Dick (17 July, p. 163) did not, in my opinion, give us a complete picture of the situation.

For instance, he did not disclose if the 100 deaths from vaccinations in England and Wales occurred in primary vaccinations and, if so, at what ages, and, more important still, how many of these deaths occurred as a result of vaccinations? As circumstances prevailing in the campaigns associated with the many (13) importations of smallpox to the U.K. in the last 20 years.

Furthermore, Professor Dick did not perhaps stress that the excellent measures which have controlled outbreaks in Britain in the past—namely, "prevention of importation, isolation and tracing of cases, and vaccination and surveillance of probable contacts—are rendered more difficult to achieve today in an era of fast air travel from every part of the world, including no fewer than 23 countries in which a total of no fewer than 31,000 cases of smallpox were reported last year. The standards of certification and control in some at least of these countries leave much to be desired. The risk of importation of smallpox is therefore greater than ever.

It seems to me foolhardy in these circumstances to abandon a measure which would prevent the fatalities which occurred in the past. Whatever exhortations are issued to the people, they will inevitably rush to get vaccinated as soon as an outbreak occurs. It is in these circumstances that vaccination becomes dangerous.