

work should be seen among the most valuable in the hospital service. Secondly, their academic qualifications were not usually good enough for them to obtain places in straight competition with school leavers—and academic grades, though far from ideal, seem the best index of medical school performance. Finally, unless these entrants were quite young, they were a “bad buy” for the community: a technician of 30 who qualified at 35 had 10-12 years less service to offer to the NHS than a school leaver. “If we were not in a position of training doctors for a shortage situation we might perhaps be able to look at it differently,” he went on. Job mobility was a luxury. The country needed to be able to retrain people whose skills had

become redundant, but it could not afford to retrain people where it was not economically necessary. “I sometimes think that I would like to be an archaeologist—if I were offered three years’ training in archaeology and a satisfactory salary I might be interested in going off to do that—but I hope I’m not being arrogant in thinking it would be extremely foolish of the community to provide the resources to allow me to do it.”

#### References

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## Letter from . . . Chicago

### Year of the rabbit

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The Year of the Rabbit began inauspiciously last February when Ziggy, the largest Indian elephant in captivity, fell head first into a ten-foot-deep moat at the Chicago's Brookfield Zoo and broke off a tusk. It was reported that during the rescue operations Ziggy received a telegram of support from another elephant in distress, the one serving as symbol of the Republican Party and still in a state of shock from the many disasters of the Year of the Tiger. Ziggy was released after 31 hours, but the rescue of the other elephant was less successful. Only 21% of adult Americans still call themselves Republicans, and despite reports that the economy is recovering the country remains beset by inflation, recession, unemployment, and crime.

The frenzy of crime and violence has also gripped the gentler sex, with the press plunged into a veritable state of Pattymania by the escapades of the heiress from San Francisco and with two women trying to shoot the president within 17 days of one another. It was also through violence that a young black woman prisoner, Miss Joan Little, achieved national publicity. In a North Carolina prison she killed her 62-year-old white jailer by stabbing him 11 times with the icepick he had used to threaten and force her into sexual acts. She was acquitted in a sensational trial; but it was later reported that a paper clipping illustrating the Biblical story of Jael had been found on the floor of her cell.

Other acts of female violence last fall were those of Ms *Culex pipiens* and *Culex quinquefasciatus*, whose favourite pastime is to feed on the blood of unsuspecting sparrows, red-winged blackbirds, grackles, thrushes, finches, warblers, and pigeons. It was the worst epidemic of St Louis encephalitis on record, affecting some 20 states. By far the largest number of cases, some 500, were reported in Illinois. Public Health officials recommended that people use mosquito netting and repellents, remain at home in the evenings, sleep with closed windows, and stay away from graveyards after dark. The epidemic in humans was cut short by malathion and a change in the weather, but the epizootic in birds smoulders on.

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#### Troubles at the AMA

The once all-powerful American Medical Association has recently had its share of trouble and, despite announcements that “the AMA is alive and well”, it is no secret that membership is lagging, funds are low, and its mission has become somewhat unclear. In 1974 financial difficulties forced the Association to borrow \$3 m and abandon a project to eliminate advertisements from its publications. In 1975 the delegates to the AMA Convention voted to increase the annual dues from \$110 to \$250, but this may result in the loss of as many as 15000 members. There were also reports that sizable back taxes may be owed on receipts from advertisements in AMA journals.

These financial difficulties have resulted in drastic cuts in programmes, staff, and publications. Of the 14 major AMA periodicals which within one year lost an aggregate of some \$5 m, some may have to be eliminated, and others have already been curtailed. At the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Dr Robert H Moser, the chief editor, disagreed with decisions made over his head and resigned because, he said, the budget cuts would “compromise quality beyond acceptable limits.”

To improve its sagging image the association has become militant and has attempted to establish itself as the champion of the rights of American doctors by supporting the striking house officers in New York and the doctors who walked out over malpractice in California. In the courts it has fought a series of battles, and last July it obtained an injunction against federal utilisation regulations requiring review of Medicare and Medicaid patients within 24 hours of admission to hospital. Spurred by its success the AMA has also contested the regulations on drug reimbursement; nevertheless, its image has become somewhat tarnished by revelations from a former employee who used the covername Sore Throat (by analogy with Watergate's Deep Throat) and claimed his aim was reform not revenge.

Twelve memoranda were stolen from the AMA and distributed to the press. They disclosed information about lobbying in presidential elections; support for Mr Nixon's ill-fated nomination of Judge Haynsworth to the Supreme Court; plans to harass, delicense, and suppress the chiropractic profession; attempts to block legislation on drugs, tax changes, health

insurance, and prepaid programmes; and the setting up of a computerised system to have compatible people nominated to government boards and commissions. The identity of Sore Throat remains a mystery, but several AMA employees volunteered to take lie-detector tests and electric paper shredders were installed to prevent further embarrassments.

### FDA activities

The Food and Drug Administration has also remained in the news. It banned the sale of pet turtles for causing 280 000 cases of salmonellosis each year; warned against oral contraceptive agents in women over 40; may outlaw the use of polyvinylchloride in plastics and of fluocarbons in spray cans; prohibited further tests with chymopapain for prolapsed discs; and recalled many apparently defective prosthetic heart valves and pace-makers. Controversy raged over the labelling of oral hypoglycaemic agents as causes of cardiovascular disease. There also was talk of action against the Searle Company for withholding data showing that metronidazole and spironolactone caused cancer in rats and mice.

Among other news pregnant women were warned that smoking may cause fetal asphyxia, diazepam cleft palates, and aspirin hemorrhagic complications. The newspapers recently reported that bacon, or rather its nitrites, may cause cancer. Minnesota has banned smoking in "public places," which it defined as "any enclosed indoor area used by the general public," including restaurants, schools, hospitals, auditoriums, and government buildings. The use of drugs in the Chicago schools has reached epidemic proportions, with 22% of 14- to 18-year-olds smoking marijuana or hashish and many selling drugs or taking opium, heroin, barbiturates, or amphetamines. Also in Chicago Harwa, the 4000-year-old Egyptian mummy from the Natural History Museum, had x-ray examinations at the hospital and was found to have ochronosis.

There were also some strange happenings in the Veterans Administration hospitals. In Chicago a wheelchair-bound patient was lost for 25 hours in a passenger lift and no one could explain why. In a Michigan V A hospital over 50 patients died mysteriously from respiratory failure and it seems that someone was injecting the muscle-relaxant pancuronium into intravenous drips. In related developments this autumn six patients in a private hospital became victims of similar attempts at the perfect crime. At the time it was recalled that when Mr Khrushchev visited Iowa in 1959 a local physician offered to assassinate him with a slow-acting drug so that death would be delayed until he returned to Russia and would appear to have occurred from natural causes.

The press, hungry for medical sensations, reported "wholesale cheating by physicians" during state reciprocity licensing examinations. Other stories told of "roughly 581 000 unnecessary operations yearly financed by Medicaid;" and of a "for profit" hospital in Chicago where wholesale tonsillectomies were done on families covered by Medicaid. Still other reports described how a small hospital developed an extensive network to fill its beds by picking up alcoholics off the streets and from "flop houses"; conveying them in public ambulances; giving them a few days' rest; and billing the state for millions of dollars.

### New York's beleaguered hospitals

In New York the economic crisis has meant further cut-backs for the city's financially beleaguered public hospitals. It has also exacerbated relations between house staff and hospital administrators, and a proposal to replace house staff with full-time salaried physicians ("since interns and residents can no longer be regarded as cheap labour") was met with a counterproposal of saving money by replacing hospital administrators with "full-time salaried chimpanzees."

A *Chicago Daily News* survey found that, while many patients wanted more house calls and shorter office waits, the majority found their doctors compassionate and were generally satisfied. Yet patients also feel free to sue at the drop of a hat—and indeed the "malpractice crisis" has dominated this Year of the Rabbit, culminating in doctors' walk-outs in California and New York. For these problems some blame the greedy lawyers and unscrupulous insurance carriers. Others accuse judges and juries, the press, or the government. Some think doctors make too much money and should put their own house in order; others blame the breakdown of traditional doctor-patient relationships; and still others want an "educational programme to counterbalance the very unrealistic public expectations regarding outcomes of health care."

The situation was partially corrected when many states followed the lead of Indiana and passed remedial legislation, with time limits for filing suits, panels for sifting out frivolous claims, and ceilings ranging from \$150 000 to \$500 000 on awards. The latter provision, however, was later ruled unconstitutional in Idaho and may require testing in a higher court.

### Longest American doctors' strike

October saw the beginning at Cook County Hospital of the longest doctors' strike in American history. In November Ziggy slumped in his stall and died of old age. Named after the great impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, the elephant had been mean and wild in his youth, but passed his last years quietly at the zoo, and even broke with Indian elephantine prejudices by taking an interest in Widget, an African female elephant. After Ziggy's demise internal convulsions shook the Republican party, with a major shake-up in the cabinet, dissensions between the various wings of the party, and Mr Nelson Rockefeller's decision not to run as a vice-presidential candidate.

So much for the Year of the Rabbit. 1976 is the Year of the Dragon. Americans celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of their nation and independence from Britain. However, Mr Robert Morley, in an advertisement for British Airways, urges to "come home America, all is forgiven." And historians remember that 1500 years ago the Roman Empire in the West came to an end when the barbarian Odoacer dethroned the youth Romulus Augustulus and sent him to live out his days in obscurity in the opulent Lucullan castle in Campania.

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*What is the mortality rate of acute viral encephalomyelitis? May symptoms relapse and does the infection lead to long-term psychiatric disturbances (such as hypomania, mental regression, etc)? If so, what is the prognosis?*

There is no one disease known as acute viral encephalomyelitis and one cannot therefore state a case fatality rate. In Britain the diagnosis is often made on clinical grounds when a patient with signs of cerebral irritation lapses into coma or semi-coma but nevertheless no virus is ever isolated. The outlook depends largely on the state of consciousness: in deeply comatose patients the case fatality may be as high as 50%, but it is always difficult to forecast the outcome. In the arbovirus encephalitides specific viruses cause different clinical types of disease with differing case fatality rates. In eastern equine encephalitis, for example, the rate may be as high as 80% in cases with cerebral disease. In western equine encephalitis the rate may be between 5 and 15% and in St Louis encephalitis between 2 and 10%. Japanese B, Murray Valley, and Russian spring-summer encephalitides are other examples of acute viral encephalomyelitis, with case fatality rates often depending on the age of the patient. The acute symptoms do not recur after the first stage of the illness, but in children convulsions tend to recur. Long-term sequelae are common: these include paralyses, behavioural changes, and mental impairment. As in any case where there is severe brain damage the outlook for the more severe sequelae is poor.

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