A system of feedback from out-patient clinics

Sir,

In order to provide a system of feedback on clinic referrals by Casualty Officers, we have designed a proforma which has proved to be very successful in practice. The proforma (Fig. 1) has a simple design, it is inexpensive and very user-friendly.

The Casualty Officer enters patient details at the top of the form which then accompanies the patient's notes to the clinic. The bottom section is completed by the clinic doctor and requires only a tick in the two boxes to indicate whether the initial management in Accident and Emergency was correct or incorrect. There is also space for further comments and to answer any questions posed by the Casualty Officer. The forms are returned at the end of each clinic session via the internal mailing system to the Accident and Emergency Registrar, who scrutinises them and distributes them to the appropriate Casualty Officers. The data so gathered forms the basis of a weekly teaching session where problems can be discussed and recurrent mistakes eliminated.

We assessed the system over the months of July and September 1989 for referrals to Orthopaedic and Hand Clinics. A high degree of compliance amongst the practitioners involved was achieved with a return rate of about 70%. There was also a high level of satisfaction expressed in favour of the system by both clinic staff and Casualty Officers. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the correctness of initial diagnoses and treatments between the two groups of Casualty Officers (79% in July and 82% in September) despite the difference in duration of Accident and Emergency experience.

A number of authors have stressed the educational value of performance feedback in clinical practice (Coles, 1989; Mitchell & Fowkes, 1985). We would commend the use of a proforma such as the one described as a useful device for this purpose. Not only do the returns on one's own referrals enhance motivation and job satisfaction, but the regular reviews provide a means of clinical audit of minor cases and a useful basis for teaching.

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