Correspondence

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 500 words.

Emigration of Doctors

SIR,—It was satisfactory to read the letter from Brian Abel-Smith and Kathleen Gales (4 July, p. 53) confirming the accuracy of my revised estimates of the volume of recent emigration of doctors from Great Britain and Ireland.¹ The methods used in our respective studies were entirely different, but the conclusions reached were similar. Their earlier belief "that accurate information about emigration could not be obtained by the methods used by Seale"² is thus no longer correct.

On reading the full report by Dr. Abel-Smith and Miss Gales in conjunction with their letter it is not immediately apparent that there was little difference between my first estimates of the total number of doctors emigrating which I published in Britain,³ the United States,⁴ and Canada⁵ in 1962 and my revised and more precise estimates published in May 1964.¹ In the 1962 publications, using the data which I then had available, I stated or implied that 600 doctors born and trained in the British Isles had emigrated annually in recent years—a rate equivalent to about one-third of the output of the medical schools. In the recent paper, with new data available, I made a more precise estimate which merely entailed a 16.6% reduction to 500 doctors per year (a total of 4,000 from Britain and 1,000 from Ireland within the last 10 years), equivalent to about one-quarter of the medical schools' output. This latter estimate has now been confirmed by the painstaking and exhaustive research by Dr. Abel-Smith and Miss Gales, which has also produced much additional information of the greatest interest.

Dr. Abel-Smith and Miss Gales state in their book *British Doctors at Home and Abroad* that in speeches given in the United States in the spring of 1962 I repeated the figures which I had published in the *British Medical Journal* of 17 March 1962. They then write that "Dr. Seale's assertions were sharply criticized by President Kennedy in a television broadcast."⁶ The source for this factual statement given in a footnote was the *Evening Standard* of 21 May 1962, page 9.

The broadcast to which Dr. Abel-Smith and Miss Gales refer was a speech by the late John F. Kennedy, President of the United States of America, delivered at Madison Square Garden, New York City, on Sunday, 20 May 1962, which was televised throughout the United States of America and recorded by the White House press secretary and by the *New York Times*. The report of the speech in the *Evening Standard* of 21 May 1962 was based on statements which the President was alleged to have made on the television broadcast which were published on the front page of the *Daily Express* on the same morning—21 May 1962. However, the verbatim text of President Kennedy's speech which I received from the White House in Washington contains no evidence that either myself or my "assertions were sharply criticized by President Kennedy";

nor does the verbatim text of the speech which was published in full by the *New York Times*. Indeed, it is not certain that President Kennedy made any reference to me whatsoever.

Dr. Abel-Smith and Miss Gales seem to have used publications of Beaverbrook Newspapers Limited as sources for their assertion rather than the White House or the *New York Times*. Although the words used by President Kennedy as recorded independently by the White House and by the *New York Times* are almost identical, they differed very substantially from the words which the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Standard* alleged he used. As a result of the report in the *Daily Express* that I had been attacked by none other than the President of the United States of America there is now a libel action in the High Court pending against its proprietors.—I am, etc.,

Richmond, Surrey.

JOHN SEALE.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Seale, J., *Brit. med. J.*, 1964, 1, 1173.
- ² Abel-Smith, B., and Gales, K., *British Doctors at Home and Abroad*, 1964, p. 17, Occasional Papers on Social Administration, No. 8, Coddicote Press, Welwyn.
- ³ Seale, J., *Brit. med. J.*, 1962, 1, 782.
- ⁴ ———, *Northw. Med. (Seattle)*, 1962, 61, 448.
- ⁵ ———, *Brit. Columbia med. J.*, 1962, 4, 393.
- ⁶ Abel-Smith, B., and Gales, K., *British Doctors at Home and Abroad*, 1964, p. 13.

SIR,—You have always given Dr. Seale credit for an honest presentation of facts as he saw them, however distasteful his writings may have been to the Ministry of Health and to many of the profession. It may be useful and act as a warning if the events of two years ago are underlined, as they show how far a Government department will go to silence the spread of unpleasant information.

The first paper of Dr. Seale's to which you refer was published in March 1962.¹ It was of great public importance, and its implications were highly unfavourable to the Ministry of Health. Having no facts with which to rebut Dr. Seale's, the Minister did all he could to discredit him in the eyes of the medical profession and the public. To give the attack the maximum acceptability Mr. Powell chose the platform of B.M.A. House—that is, our own professional association—and at a Conference of Local Medical Committees—that is, our own colleagues. To give it the maximum publicity he asked that the national press should be admitted, which was contrary to custom, and to have the text circulated throughout the world as an official British Government document.

With the stage thus set and the arc-lights full on, Mr. Powell proceeded to refer to "the absurd statement that a third of our doctors emigrate," and he continued, "Now, of course, you and I know perfectly well that is 'nonsense' . . . and you as the representatives of the family doctors . . . are no doubt irked, as I am irked, by the slander upon your service which is implicit in these

grotesque allegations" (*Supplement*, 16 June, p. 267). Your own editorial comment at this time (16 June 1962, p. 1675) was that this represented "a typical authoritarian political approach to what is still very much an open question."

Since then Dr. Seale has lived under a cloud produced by this ministerial sneer. However correct he may have known himself to be, the experience cannot have been pleasant; although he may have drawn some cynical amusement from contemplating the ponderous size of the machine which was constructed to crush him. It was clearly the Minister's hope that he could make no recovery from this hammer blow, if not as a doctor, certainly as a medical statistician. But so far from considering the matter closed Dr. Seale has continued to treat the affair as "very much an open question." He has turned the tables on his illustrious opponent, and furthermore Dr. Brian Abel-Smith and Miss Kathleen Gales (4 July, p. 53) state that their own figures are in substantial agreement with his.

Mr. Powell has now resigned his position of Minister of Health, an event which would be irrelevant except that I understand he took this considerable step as a matter of high principle. I am sure, Sir, you would give him the hospitality of your columns if, in accord with such principles, he were to send to the *B.M.J.* a letter indicating regret for what he said.

But there is much more in this than an affair of individuals. In serving the public in existing conditions the profession has in many respects already passed the position of full-stretch. Medical manpower will become steadily even shorter over the next few years. This is an inexorable development which nothing can alter. I do not intend to make this letter an excuse for airing suggestions as to what might be done, but the worst possible approach is the head-in-the-sand policy of crying "nonsense" to facts when they are unpalatable.—I am, etc.,

Eastbourne, Sussex.

R. HALE-WHITE.

REFERENCE

- ¹ Seale, J., *Brit. med. J.*, 1962, 1, 782.

SIR,—The contents of your editorial (*B.M.J.*, 4 July, p. 1), "Pertinax's" comments (p. 52), and the letter from Dr. Abel-Smith and Kathleen Gales (p. 53) will come as no surprise to those who know Dr. John Seale and who recognize the sterling worth of his researches into medical emigration. Far from Dr. Seale's figures being (in Mr. Enoch Powell's words to the Panel Conference) a "slander upon your service," it would appear that Dr. Seale himself has been liberally slandered by the politicians.

To doctors who have been nurtured on scientific foundations, and in a profession of relatively high honour and integrity, it is truly shattering to realize the falsifications in which politicians are liable to indulge. Nor are such falsifications the perquisite of any one political party. You freely quote the utterances of a former Minister of Health (Mr. Enoch Powell), but could equally well have quoted the statements of a possible