Parasitic Productions, in association with the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, invites you to its annual conference on the NHS. It is for opinion leaders, including non-executive board members like you—people who are moulding the NHS for the

next millennium.

This month's annual conference is different from last month's annual conference, which was designed to facilitate medium term thinking in small Trusts. This one is designed to facilitate long term thinking in medium sized Trusts. It will also be relevant to large and small Trusts and to medium and short term strategic thinking.

You will hear outstanding speakers whose colour pictures are reproduced in this brochure. They include the doyen of US health management gurus, Reggie P Errin,

author of *Health Thru Work!*, *Work Thru Health!* and the worldwide bestseller, *Thru Work, Health!* In what promises to be an inspirational presentation, Reggie will unveil some of the revolutionary concepts from his forthcoming book, video, and interactive CD, *Work Health Thru!*

The programme includes keynote addresses by leading politicians. Delegates to past conferences will confirm that on several occasions one of the advertised politicians has actually turned up—a tribute to the high-level regard for these meetings. As a lighthearted inducement, we shall enter the names of the first 500 registrants in a sweepstake based on exactly how late the politician will be.

For many, the highlight will be the debate, "Whither healthcare?" This will be an absorbing clash of deeply held principles between a fairly right wing health economist and a very right wing health economist. It will be insightfully chaired by one of the BBC's respected team of weather forecasters with a lifelong interest in healthcare matters.

The underlying purpose of this conference is to recover the "feelgood factor" which our research tells us is missing from so many Trust boards. We have therefore made strenuous efforts to exclude as far as possible any

Another glossy flyer

talks by practising members of the medical profession.

Nevertheless, we recognise the prime importance of ensuring that discussions are evidence based and relevant to the care of individual patients. This is why we ask you, when filling in your registration form, to give details of any medical procedures which you (or a close relative) have undergone during the past ten years. The information will remain confidential but will be used in our computerised system to enhance networking among delegates. Research has shown that this is by far the most important factor in top level NHS decision making.

In 1996 the NHS is facing its most potentially historic changes since 1995. These involve not only slogans but also letterheads and the job titles of many senior managers. You, like us, have a vested interest in promoting change, while at the same time ensuring that the people who deliver the service are left alone to do their jobs, and that the NHS's finite resources are used wisely.

The registration fee (£800 including coffee) can be reclaimed from your Finance Director. Parasitic Productions is an Investor In People.—JAMES OWEN DRIFE, *professor of obstetrics and gynaecology, Leeds*

Mrs Simpson's knickers

Was the Duchess of Windsor a man?" shouted the newspaper placards earlier this year after publication of *The Duchess of Windsor* by Michael Bloch (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, £18.19). The book makes two main assertions: that the duchess, though married three times, never had normal full sexual relations with any of her husbands or lovers and "may have died a virgin" and that she had some condition which made it impossible for her ever to have children. The press stories suggested that some of the evidence for these claims came from an unnamed doctor who had been given the details by another doctor who had examined the duchess.

Gossip about the medical condition of prominent personalities has, sadly, become much more frequent in recent years, but it is still very rare for doctors who work in high society to be anything less than 100% discreet. The contentious issue is how far confidentiality should persist after the death of the patient. Should medical records eventually become available to historians? This continuing obligation of confidentiality was much debated in the late 1970s after the

publication of the memoirs of Lord Moran, a former president of the Royal College of Physicians of England and for many years the personal physician to Sir Winston Churchill. Moran's diaries included detailed accounts of Churchill's illnesses including his strokes and the efforts made to conceal the severity of his disability from colleagues and the public. Moran was heavily censured, in particular by the BMA and the *BMJ*, which deplored the "loosening of professional reticence" and argued that it would be most unfortunate if Lord Moran's book led the public to think that standards of confidentiality could be relaxed. Moran issued a writ for libel against the BMA, but the action never got to court.

Confidentiality is at the heart of consultations with lawyers and doctors and clearly it has to remain so—yet doctors and lawyers are very fond of gossip. At medical and legal dinner parties the talk is often indiscreet. If challenged those present will indignantly claim that "within the profession we know how to maintain confidence" and "nothing said in this house will go any further." That may have been so in the first half of this century, when the newspapers and the BBC told the public

nothing of the Prince of Wales's liaison with Mrs Simpson, and even as late as the 1960s the press operated a voluntary self censorship on issues such as the promiscuous homosexuality of the MP Tom Driberg—impossible to imagine today.

Clearly the present Prince of Wales cannot expect any reticence from the press about his private life. Gossip is now highly marketable, even when it is probably untrue. In an era of leaks and breaches of confidence doctors need to be watchful of their records, which should probably be destroyed after the death of the patient.

As for Mrs Simpson, later the Duchess of Windsor: this sad figure deserves a better fate than prurient speculation. I prefer to remember her as the source of the aphorism that "No woman can be too rich or too thin."—TONY SMITH, *associate editor, BMJ*