are no clinical data showing that the use of toremifene in place of tamoxifen would reduce the incidence of endometrial cancer. Orion Pharma should rethink its marketing strategy.

CHRIS TWELVES
Senior lecturer in medical oncology
ADRIAN HARNETT
Consultant clinical oncologist

Beatson Oncology Centre,
Western Infirmary,
Glasgow G11 6NT

- 1 Friedman MA, Trimble EL, Abrams JS. Tamoxifen: trials, tribulations and trade-offs. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 1994;86: 478-9.
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- 3 Hayes DF, Van Zyl JA, Hacking A, Goedhals L, Bezwod WR, Mailliard JA, et al. Randomized comparison of tamoxifen and two separate doses of toremifene in postmenopausal women with metastatic breast cancer. *J Clin Oncol* 1995;13:2556-66.

Manufacturer's reply

EDITOR,—Naturally we are concerned that Chris Twelves and Adrian Harnett take exception to our advertisement for Fareston (toremifene). Yes, the advertisement focuses on patients' concerns, but are they not relevant? It is not surprising that some women diagnosed as having breast cancer are concerned by what they have read or heard about tamoxifen. Debate in the medical press,^{1,2} sensationalism in the lay press, and the information superhighway mean that women are more aware of the issues than ever before.

Twelves and Harnett focus exclusively on endometrial cancer, and yet the advertisement makes no mention of endometrial cancer. Clearly this subject is uppermost in their thoughts because of the debate that has been stimulated on it, but what other issues concern patients? The cancer charity Tenovus has recently published a booklet entitled *Tamoxifen—the facts*.³ The publication covers the 20 questions that are most commonly asked about tamoxifen. These include "Does tamoxifen cause cancer of the womb (uterine cancer)?" and "Does tamoxifen cause liver cancer?"

Our advertisement for toremifene does not sensationalise the issue; it simply acknowledges and reflects the situation that exists. It does not make any claim for toremifene over tamoxifen with regard to endometrial cancer for the reasons outlined. The advertisement states, however, that toremifene does not cause DNA adducts and is not hepatocarcinogenic in rats—which is in total contrast to tamoxifen.⁴ The clinical relevance of this in patients is not yet determined. Nevertheless, this is an important preclinical difference between the two products that to the best of our knowledge has not been studied clinically in sufficient detail. This absence of evidence is not the same as there being no evidence of effect, and thus the experience with tamoxifen is irrelevant here.

Toremifene offers, for the first time, an alternative to tamoxifen for first line hormonal treatment of hormone dependent metastatic breast cancer in postmenopausal patients. Doctors will have to decide the most appropriate treatment, bearing in mind the principle outlined in the Calman report that "Patients, families and carers should be given clear information and assistance in a form they can understand about treatment options and outcomes available to them at all stages of treatment from diagnosis onwards."⁵

MARTIN C EAGLE
Business development manager, oncology

Orion Pharma (UK),
Newbury RG14 5UX

- 1 King CM. Tamoxifen and the induction of cancer. *Carcinogenesis* 1995;16:1449-54.
- 2 Bulbrook RD. Long term adjuvant therapy for primary breast cancer. *BMJ* 1996;312:389-90.
- 3 Tenovus. *Tamoxifen—the facts*. Cardiff: Tenovus, 1996.
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- 5 Expert Advisory Group on Cancer. *A policy framework for commissioning cancer services. A report to the chief medical officers of England and Wales*. London: Department of Health, 1995.

Community pharmacists are increasingly supervising treatments

EDITOR,—Louise Sell and colleagues draw attention to the fact that community pharmacists are an underused resource in ensuring compliance in the treatment of drug dependence and tuberculosis.¹ They note that community pharmacists have expressed willingness to supervise the consumption of methadone; in Glasgow this willingness has been translated into practice. In early 1994 a fifth of the 214 community pharmacies in Glasgow were supervising the administration of methadone.² This proportion has now reached three fifths, and over 70% of all methadone dispensed in these pharmacies is now supervised. During 1995 the consumption of over 300 000 doses of methadone was supervised in the community pharmacies in Glasgow. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain has now produced preliminary guidelines on supervised self administration of methadone.³

Many pharmacists have expressed their willingness to extend this service to other therapeutic areas, and to our knowledge treatment with other medicines (for example, benzodiazepines and dihydrocodeine) and for other conditions (for example, Alzheimer's disease) is being supervised.

The benefits to patients as well as for pharmacists and society at large clearly point to this being an appropriate use of a valuable professional resource. We have already been contacted about this service by an appreciable number of drug treatment services throughout England, and we would welcome further contacts.

ROBERT SCOTT
Clinical director
HOWARD MCNULTY
Chief area pharmaceutical officer

Glasgow Drug Problem Service,
Ruchill Hospital,
Glasgow G20 9NB

- 1 Sell L, Finch E, Farrell M, Sheridan J, Strang J. Directly observed treatment for tuberculosis. *BMJ* 1996;313:45. (6 July.)
- 2 Scott RTA, Burnett SJ, McNulty H. Supervised administration of methadone by pharmacists. *BMJ* 1994;308:1438.
- 3 Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain Scottish Department Executive. *Pharmaceutical services to drug misusers: supervised self administration of methadone within community pharmacies. An interim position paper*. Edinburgh: RPSGB, 1995.

Septic arthritis in osteoarthritic hips

Authors' interpretation of radiograph was wrong

EDITOR,—D J Knight and colleagues report the development of septic arthritis in osteoarthritic hip joints.¹ They state that the radiograph in figure 1 in their paper shows an osteoarthritic right hip and that that in figure 2 shows the subsequent changes of septic arthritis. In figure 1 the femoral head is flattened, and there is extensive destruction of subarticular bone. The joint space is narrowed, with evidence of a joint

effusion with bulging of the lateral fat plane. The acetabular roof is osteopenic, and there is erosion of the medial acetabular margin. The radiological findings are those of a septic arthritis and not osteoarthritis as stated by the authors.² The destructive process has progressed by the time of the radiograph shown in figure 2.

D C HOWLETT
Radiologist

X Ray Department,
St Thomas's Hospital,
London SE1 7EH

- 1 Knight DJ, Gilbert FJ, Hutchinson JD. Septic arthritis in osteoarthritic hips. *BMJ* 1996;313:40-1. (6 July.)
- 2 Renton P. Periosteal reaction; bone and joint infections, sarcoid. In: Sutton D, ed. *A textbook of radiology and imaging*. 5th ed. London: Churchill Livingstone, 1993:52-4.

Authors' reply

EDITOR,—Despite D C Howlett's comments we believe that the changes in our figure 1 are compatible with a diagnosis of osteoarthritis. There is appreciable narrowing of the joint space, with deformity of the femoral head and cystic changes—all signs of osteoarthritis. Also, the second x ray film was obtained seven months after the first, and an infective process would be expected to progress more rapidly. Furthermore, we believe that the lateral fat plane sign mentioned by Howlett is unreliable as a sign of disease of the hip joint, especially in adults.¹

We believe that the basic lesson of our paper remains. The clinical picture and the x ray changes of osteoarthritis and septic arthritis overlap, and infection may be missed if it is not considered.

F J GILBERT
Professor of radiology
D J KNIGHT
Consultant orthopaedic surgeon

Aberdeen Royal Infirmary,
Aberdeen AB9 2ZB

J D HUTCHISON
Professor of orthopaedic surgery

University of Aberdeen,
Aberdeen AB9 1FX

- 1 Resnick D, Niwayama G. *Anatomy of individual joints. In: Diagnosis of bone and joint disorders*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: W B Saunders, 1988:712-3.

More emergency insulin distribution projects should be set up

EDITOR,—The International Diabetes Institute and the supporters of its emergency insulin distribution project are encouraged by J Burdon's personal view detailing how this project has helped diabetic patients in rural Zaire.¹ The project obtains insulin that would otherwise be destroyed and has distributed 63 000 vials to countries in every continent.² I would encourage readers to consider establishing similar programmes, as has been done in New Zealand; those who are interested may contact me for more information. There are also many advantages in having a humanitarian medical supply project integrated with an international medical centre rather than separate from it, and we would encourage other such centres to consider adopting a similar project.

Lifesaving insulin gets destroyed because of lack of knowledge of nominal expiry dates, and no doubt this also occurs with some other medicines. Practical programmes that allow such medicines to be used would save many lives.

The emergency insulin distribution project is funded entirely by donations. With further donations we would be able to distribute more insulin that would otherwise be destroyed. We would welcome correspondence from individuals and

organisations who wish to support the project. Please note that the PO Box quoted at the end of Burdon's article is no longer valid; the correct address is that given below.

RON RAAB

Coordinator, emergency insulin distribution project
International Diabetes Institute,
260 Kooyong Road Caulfield,
Victoria 3162,
Australia
idistr@ozemail.com.au

- 1 Burdon J. Another deadly Zairian disease. *BMJ* 1996;313:58.
2 Raab RS. An emergency insulin distribution programme: taking a lead role in the international insulin supply crisis. *International Diabetes Federation Bulletin* 1995;4:40-1.

Stress in general practice

Stressed doctors should take time to recover before deciding on their future

EDITOR,—I hope that the anonymous general practitioner who writes about the stress he or she is suffering while in practice has been helped by the counselling service that the BMA has set up and is receiving professional guidance.¹ I had an almost identical breakdown a couple of years ago, when it was not acceptable to be seen to be weak. From my own experience I would urge the author to accept help and not feel guilty. It sounds as though the author has always been a caring and sympathetic doctor and, when well again, will be a wiser and even more valuable member of the profession.

I would urge people in the author's position to take time away to recover and not to retire or move sideways until they are able to do so with absolute confidence. We can make rash decisions when ill. They should not feel that they must rush to get back to support colleagues. If they do leave work then they should not feel unhappy about claiming their augmented pension and should return to NHS work when ready; this will not affect their pension provided they opt out of the NHS scheme offered with the new job. They should be warned that they will suffer a period of "bereavement" if they leave work, which needs to be talked through.

I would be interested to know whether the BMA has any advice to offer those of us who are relatively young, living on pensions, who feel that there must be something we could usefully do to prevent the mixture of loss of worth and tedium that we experience from time to time.

DICK DAVIES
Retired general practitioner

34 Tabor's Avenue,
Great Baddow,
Chelmsford CM2 7ET

- 1 The stress: is it our fault? *BMJ* 1996;313:120. (13 July.)

General practitioners must educate patients in the appropriate use of services

EDITOR,—I get concerned about the picture painted of morale in general practice, particularly distressing examples such as that given in the recent anonymous personal view.¹ I believe that, of all the areas of clinical medicine in which I have worked, general practice provides the greatest opportunity for clinicians to practise unfettered medicine. Some general practitioners may disagree with this view and will point to the 1990 contract for general practitioners as heavy handed interference by the government.

Morale is often mentioned to me as a major problem. Reasons given include an increased workload, more demanding patients, a lack of general practitioners, list sizes, a lack of adequate funding, inappropriate discharge from hospital, and care in the community. The end result is

overworked, stressed doctors who believe that they are not valued either by the government or by some patients.

The economist's view can be put simply. Jean Baptiste Say, an 18th century political economist, said that supply creates its own demand. This "law" is often proved true in practices that employ a partner to ease the workload. Once established, the partner generates a demand for care (not necessarily appropriate) that may previously have been unmet. Similarly, some practices, albeit only a few, tempered their acceptance of the financial inducements in the 1990 contract and have developed only those services that they wished to develop. This meant that they had to decide on the work and personal lifestyle that they wished to lead and not the other way round. Curtailing supply appropriately has been a common tactic in the hospital sector, but few general practitioners actively consider it in their own setting.

Deming wrote that "Customers (patients) are not in a good position to judge what will serve them in the future. The producer (doctor) is in a far better position," adding that a key dimension to this is "training the customer how to use the product."² Education of patients is commonly viewed with scepticism, although over the years a number of practices have conditioned their patients to use services appropriately.

The main difficulty in implementing these approaches is attitude and confidence. It requires a combined partnership effort to work effectively, with mutual support and understanding. The introduction of cooperatives for out of hours work throughout Britain should have restored some confidence in general practitioners' ability to manage the demands of patients and to educate patients in the appropriate use of services. The big question is whether this knowledge and experience can be translated to daytime practice.

NICK BOTTONE
Consultant development adviser

Management Development Group,
Scottish Health Service Centre,
Edinburgh EH4 2LF

- 1 The stress: is it our fault? *BMJ* 1996;313:120. (13 July.)
2 Deming WE. *Out of the crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

American guidelines on managed care are not the answer

EDITOR,—If, in their editorial on clinical guidelines in the independent sector, Gillian Fairfield and Rhys Williams are suggesting that the guidelines used by American managed care organisations to authorise care are evidence based then they are misguided.¹ In a national poll Group Health in Seattle was recently acknowledged to be "one of the best [managed care companies] at monitoring health, risk behaviors and disease outcomes."² Group Health has clinical guidelines that are strongly based on the effectiveness literature. They total just 13. Some health maintenance organisations offer incentives for limiting referrals and certain procedures through reviews of use. These "referral guidelines" have existed for a long time and are seldom evidence based; their intent is cost containment rather than cost effectiveness. If it is these to which the authors are referring then it would be a retrograde step for the NHS to adopt such a practice.

The authors correctly predict that private patients in Britain would not accept rationing by their insurers. Enrolment is dwindling in traditional health maintenance organisations with their own staff, which are renowned for

their gatekeeping function. The insurers are busy developing alternatives that are more patient friendly and have names such as "options" or "alliant plus"; these even allow the choice of physicians paid on a fee for service basis—whose costs, ironically, managed care was set up to control.

Private insurers have no advantage over the NHS in the provision of useful data on outcomes. The independent health company BUPA only recently entered the primary care market, where the bulk of high cost and high volume long term care will occur in a primary care led NHS. Group Health has been host to many patient outcome research teams; despite the existence of data back to 1977 the lack of an appropriate coding system that links processes with outcomes is the barrier to more sophisticated research into outcomes. Read codes, which the Somerset morbidity project used,³ or new diagnosis codes may help.⁴

Surely the only place to experiment with evidence based guidelines is in the NHS. It is there that the real clinical controversies exist as doctors struggle with whether treatment A will be cost effective given patient B's age, sex, and socioeconomic and disease status, rather than in the private sector, where the concern is mainly elective surgery in people of higher socioeconomic status. Techniques of adjusting for case mix are increasingly being used to aid this complex process.⁵ Perhaps the private insurers' funds could best be used to support such an effort in the NHS if the interest is truly in collaboration.

RHIAN EVANS
Research associate

Center for Health Studies,
Group Health,
Seattle, WA 98101,
USA

- 1 Fairfield G, Williams R. Clinical guidelines in the independent health care sector. *BMJ* 1996;312:1554-5. (22 June.)
2 America's best HMOs: rating the top managed care companies. *Newsweek* 1996 Jun 24.
3 Pearson N, O'Brien J, Thomas H, Ewings P, Gallier L, Bussey A. Collecting morbidity data in general practice: the Somerset morbidity project. *BMJ* 1996;312:1517-21. (15 June.)
4 Mayfield JA, Strand T, Toya AR. A call for specific codes for diabetes foot and eye care. *Diabetes Care* 1995;18:418-21.
5 Davenport R, Dennis M, Warlow C. Effect of correcting outcome data for case mix: an example from stroke medicine. *BMJ* 1996;312:1503-5. (15 June.)

Statistics should reflect existence of two Indias

EDITOR,—I wish to comment on Ganapati Mudur's news item, which refers to the poor health conditions of Indian women.¹ Unfortunately, the article does not reflect the better conditions that exist in the southern and western states of India—namely, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Punjab—because the statistics for these states are combined with those for the backward states. Such news items are a great discouragement to the efforts of the local states and the voluntary organisations that are striving hard to improve women's health in India.

I hope that in future the *BMJ* will try to differentiate between the two Indias. That there are two Indias is sad but a fact.

B RAMAMURTHI
Professor of neurosurgery

The Clinic,
27 2nd Main Road,
CIT Colony,
Madras-600 004,
India

- 1 Mudur G. India's women get poor deal on health care, says World Bank. *BMJ* 1996;312:1627-8. (29 June.)