vasodilatation induced by prostaglandin, just as readily as it fits with the use of trimethoprim. Once the patient was well again, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs would not be expected to cause problems, and thus rechallenge with the drug would be of no discriminatory value in this case. It seems unnecessary to propose an unusual effect of trimethoprim when the case is readily explained by the known and commonly observed effects of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs,

C A O'CALLAGHAN

Renal Unit,
Guy's Hospital,
London SE1 9RT

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New roles for general practitioners

GPs frustrated by restricted access to investigations

EDITOR,—Stuart Handysides's article on new roles for general practitioners states what is reasonable but obvious to most practising general practitioners.¹ The limitation on medical responsibility in general practice is not so much general practitioners' ability to do the work but the limitation imposed by hospital investigative departments which will carry out certain tests only when the request is in the name of a staff consultant. This is all very well, but probably most of these requests are issued by junior doctors, generally on their own initiative and generally correctly. There is nothing more frustrating than to leave a post as a senior house officer or registrar and to enter general practice and be told that you cannot request a barium enema or endoscopy, let alone computed tomography or magnetic resonance imaging, other than through a hospital outpatient clinic.

Much of this policy is traditional rather than based on the results of audit. Schemes in which open access exist, and "supervised" review of referrals for specific investigations, work well and are popular with specialists, general practitioners, and patients as they save them all time. Additionally, there is a saving to the hospital as general practitioners are inevitably more experienced than the clinics' senior house officers and request only specifically required tests, requesting a batch of secondary investigations only when positive results are obtained. Becoming a "general practitioner physician" is well within the capability of all but a few general practitioners, particularly if initiatives were set up locally.

NIGEL DE KARE-SILVER

London NW2 7RX

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General physicians not a thing of the past

EDITOR,—Stuart Handysides states that "the general physician in hospital practice is a thing of the past,"¹ quoting a speculative article written some 10 years ago. Neither the statement nor the speculation is correct. Most posts advertised for consultant physicians, even though a specialty is specified, require the appointee to attend general medical outpatients and to look after patients admitted as medical emergencies. Despite the

caption of the photograph in Handysides's article it would be difficult to see how general practitioners can "take on the role of hospital general physicians" in charge of such conditions as upper gastrointestinal bleeding, myocardial infarction, overdoses, and diabetic ketoacidosis. To do so would add an impossible burden to their already heavy clinical load. Moreover, acquiring the necessary knowledge additional to that already required by a general practitioner would tax even the most agile and retentive brain. Furthermore, it is difficult to envisage a general practitioner, working predominantly in the community, teaching medicine as practised in a hospital.

Although Handysides is right to be concerned about the dangers of the "Calman recommendations" squeezing out general medicine, negotiations to enable most trainees to be certificated in both general internal medicine and another specialty without unrealistic prolongation of the period of training are well advanced.

While the welfare of the patient is best secured if care is shared between the physician and the general practitioner, standards would be unlikely to be maintained if general practitioners took on the role of hospital general physician.

D R LONDON
B L PENTECOST

Royal College of Physicians,
London NW1 4LE

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Capture-recapture as a tool for programme evaluation

EDITOR,—The capture-recapture technique described by Ronald LaPorte¹ may be particularly useful in studying marginalised or inaccessible groups to assess the size and characteristics of the target population and the proportion in contact with services. For example, Fisher *et al* used a capture-recapture analysis of individual patterns of contact with homeless agencies in north east Westminster to estimate the total number of homeless people.² They also used the data to determine use of services and concluded that, during the study, almost two thirds of the homeless people in the area did not contact the statutory or voluntary agencies involved in the study.

We recently used capture-recapture analysis to estimate the numbers of sex workers meeting clients at bars in Mutare, Zimbabwe, and to assess their levels of contact with the Mutare HIV Prevention Programme (D Wilson *et al*, VIIIth International Conference on AIDS and STDs, Amsterdam, 1993). This programme was founded in 1991 and is run jointly by Mutare City Health Department and Family AIDS Caring Trust with technical support from the University of Zimbabwe. The study was conducted over four nights on two weekends at a weighted random sample of bars in the city. On each night programme workers held structured interviews with women reporting involvement in commercial sex. Because prostitution is illegal and stigmatised we did not try to use names to distinguish individuals. Instead, each night different gifts were given to each woman interviewed. We used information collected about items received on previous nights to assess on which nights sex workers had been contacted during the survey. To assess programme coverage, 204 sex workers were also interviewed about their contact with the programme.

Each night, 600-800 sex workers were interviewed. A preliminary capture-recapture analysis of the patterns of contact indicated that about 1600-2000 women were selling sex from bars over the two weekends. A more accurate estimate that accounts for different work patterns and move-

ment in and out of the population is being determined. Programme coverage was found to be extremely high, with almost all sex workers reporting contact with the prevention programme, 83% reporting seeing an AIDS lecture that month, and 93% reporting obtaining condoms from the programme.

These examples illustrate the potential uses of the capture-recapture technique as a tool for programme evaluation. Such information can be used to assess local needs and help guide programme planning and management.

CHARLOTTE WATTS
ANTHONY ZWI

Health Policy Unit,
Department of Public Health and Policy,
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,
London WC1E 7HT

DAVID WILSON

Department of Psychology,
University of Zimbabwe,
Harare, Zimbabwe

SIMON MASHABABE
GEOFF FOSTER

Mutare HIV Prevention Programme,
Mutare, Zimbabwe

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Management of cutaneous T cell lymphoma

EDITOR,—We agree with Paul A Bunn that multi-centre prospective randomised trials in patients with properly staged cutaneous T cell lymphoma are urgently needed to define the optimal topical or systemic treatment.¹ We also agree with his comments regarding the combination of psoralens and ultraviolet A treatment and interferon, which may produce a higher complete response rate than either agent used singly; we have useful experience of this.

We have successfully managed an 89 year old woman with tumour stage cutaneous T cell lymphoma with this combination. She presented with cutaneous plaques and ulcerated nodular lesions, which had relapsed after treatment with localised kilovoltage radiotherapy. There was no evidence of systemic disease on clinical examination or investigation. Cutaneous T cell lymphoma was confirmed on skin biopsy. Treatment was started with 3 million units of interferon alfa-2a subcutaneously three times a week and psoralens and ultraviolet A treatment twice a week, initially as an inpatient as she lived a considerable distance from our hospital. Within four weeks of the start of treatment there was a partial response (greater than 50% clearance of cutaneous lesions), which continued over the next month, when she was treated as an outpatient.

Psoralens and ultraviolet A treatment was then stopped at the patient's request because she found travelling difficult. Although treatment with interferon was continued, there was evidence of progression of disease at review a month later. The superiority of combination treatment was confirmed on two occasions over the next six months, with clearance of cutaneous lesions during inpatient treatment with both interferon and psoralens and ultraviolet A and gradual relapse during outpatient treatment with interferon alone.

Three studies have highlighted the combination of interferon and psoralens and ultraviolet A as a promising new treatment.^{2,4} The combined data from the 31 patients treated in these studies give a complete remission rate of 71% (22 patients) and a partial remission rate of 26% (eight patients). Patients with all stages of disease and those extensively pretreated with other modalities have