Sensitivity and specificity can both improve as more investigations are used

EDITOR—We wish to reply to Davie and McMurray's comments about our article on the assessment of acutely dyspnoeic patients with suspected heart failure; we did not see it before publication.¹ We too were surprised by the excellent sensitivity of clinical examination in our study. We suspect that all our patients with systolic dysfunction had advanced disease and that assessment by general practitioners before admission resulted in referral of only those with New York Heart Association grade III or IV heart failure.

Davie and McMurray criticise the sensitivities obtained when combinations of investigations were used in addition to clinical examination. The apparent misunderstanding relates to the fact that we used clinical examination *and/or* the various investigations (chest radiography, electrocardiography) in the detection of systolic dysfunction. The left hand column in table 2 in our paper shows the collection of investigations that were used to reach the diagnosis in each case, but the final diagnosis was based on the appropriate abnormality on clinical examination and chest radiography or electrocardiography. This is why sensitivity and specificity can both improve as more investigations are considered. We apologise if this was unclear from our table 2.

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1 Davie A, McMurray J. Investigation of left ventricular dysfunction in acute dyspnoea. *BMJ* 1997;315:604-5. (6 September.)

Voluntary agreement for tobacco advertising at retail premises not being adhered to

EDITOR—The voluntary agreement on tobacco products' advertising and promotion, dated 21 December 1994, has two clauses for retail premises, which came into force on 1 January 1997.¹ Firstly, the tobacco

industry undertook "to remove all external permanent advertising material at retail premises for all tobacco products ... by 31 December 1996." Secondly, "The companies will endeavour to ensure that their existing shop advertising material carries the health warnings prescribed by this agreement by 1 January 1997." The Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship confirmed (personal communication, June 1996) that health warnings such as "Smoking can cause fatal diseases" rather than "Smoking causes fatal diseases" would breach the voluntary agreement after 1 January 1997. We have monitored the compliance with these new clauses at off licences in the Borough of Solihull.

In April 1996 we visited all 56 off licences and recorded details of all external and internal tobacco advertisements. Seventeen had advertisements that would breach the voluntary agreement if still present after 1 January 1997. These 17 were revisited in April 1997. All 12 permanent external tobacco advertisements had been removed from six off licences (table 1). However, 11 advertisements with old health warnings remained ("Smoking can cause fatal diseases" (10 items), "Cigarettes can seriously damage your health" (one item)) (table 1); these were reported to the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship. The reply from the committee, dated 4 June, indicated that eight advertisements had been removed, two items had been updated with new health warnings, and one item was an inadvertent breach (the retailer had covered the health warning), but none were considered to breach the voluntary agreement. We lodged an appeal with the committee, whose reply of 23 June reversed its decision and confirmed that the 11 items with old health warnings did indeed breach the agreement.

Annual surveys to monitor compliance with the voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising have been carried out since 1993 in the Borough of Solihull and have detected breaches (table 2).²⁻³ One possible explanation for the tobacco companies' failure to comply with one of the new clauses in the voluntary agreement is that the agreement is so complex that even the Committee

Table 2 Number of breaches and inadvertent breaches (fault of retailer) of voluntary agreement on tobacco products' advertising and promotion, from annual surveys in Borough of Solihull

Year	Site	No of sites	Breaches	Inadvertent breaches
1993	Newsagents	84	10	5
1994	Motor show at National Exhibition Centre	1	3	0
1995	Petrol stations	40	1	0
1996	Off licences	55	0	5
1997	Off licences	17	11	0

for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship is not clear as to what constitutes a breach.

The breaches in Solihull and other localities⁴ make it imperative that the government achieves its proposal to ban tobacco advertising, sponsorship, and promotion. A voluntary agreement does not provide adequate protection for young people.

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1 Department of Health. *Voluntary agreement on tobacco products' advertising and promotion*. London: DoH, 1994.

2 Robertson W, Field NJG, Bird C, Parfitt DE. Voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising. *BMJ* 1995;310:124.

3 Robertson W, Archer P, Jeffreys W, Parfitt D, Field N. Survey of tobacco advertising and display of the "under-16" sign: influencing compliance with the voluntary agreement. *Health Educ J* 1996;55:382-8.

4 Mindell JS. The UK voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising: a comatose policy? *Tobacco Control* 1993;2: 209-14.

Epidural anaesthesia does not cause long term backache

EDITOR—MacArthur et al comment¹ on our editorial on back pain, pregnancy, and childbirth. In the editorial we indicated that no prospective study has shown a link between epidural analgesia in labour and long term backache, while referring to their study, which did suggest a link,² as retrospective. We are sorry that this has caused concern. In our editorial we pointed out that prospective studies consistently show an incidence of backache during pregnancy of around 50%. Yet in the survey of women delivering in Birmingham Maternity Hospital over eight years only 9% recalled having had backache during pregnancy.² Our own retrospective survey found half the expected rate of gestational backache.

We are aware of the considerable effort made to avoid bias in the Birmingham survey. While data were collected at delivery for all women in Birmingham, recording of long term symptoms required recollection for up to nine years. Though no evidence of

Table 1 Tobacco advertising material at 17 off licences in April 1996, and results of follow up visit in April 1997 to monitor compliance with new clauses of voluntary agreement of 1 January 1997

Advertising affected by new clause of voluntary agreement	Initial survey April 1996	Follow up survey April 1997
Permanent external tobacco advertisements	6 Full window dressings	All removed
	4 Fascias	
	1 Awning	
	1 Illuminated hanging sign	
Tobacco advertisements with "old" health warnings	9 Showcases	7 Showcases—for Benson and Hedges (5), Marlboro, Silk Cut
	3 Open/closed signs	3 Open/closed signs—advertising Embassy (2), Benson and Hedges
	1 Window bill	1 Window bill—advertising Raffles
	1 Swinging sign on pavement	Removed
	1 Waste bin	Removed