

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Debating the efficacy of smoking intervention strategies

Sir—In a recent "comment" in this journal, Davey Smith *et al.*<sup>1</sup> extensively debate some potential intervention strategies mentioned briefly at the end of my paper "A birth cohort analysis of the smoking epidemic in West Germany".<sup>2</sup> The primary, if not exclusive, intention of my paper was to provide descriptive data on the development of the "smoking epidemic" in this country. In fact, potential intervention strategies were not addressed at all in the first submission of the paper, and they were added only at the request of an anonymous reviewer.

One of the reasons for my reluctance to address potential intervention strategies, such as smoking policies at the workplace, was the fact that they indeed deserve an in depth discussion far beyond the scope of my paper. In particular, I fully agree with Davey Smith *et al* that, "simple diffusion models, whether of research into public policy or of innovations in behaviour from the more educated to less educated sections of society"<sup>1</sup> describe inadequately the complexity of health promotion and health behaviour. This assertion is trivial, however. What I missed in the comment by Davey Smith *et al* are constructive proposals for scientifically sound approaches to the topic in addition to the series of potentially misleading ecological correlations which they provide. A useful first step would have been a careful review of more informative, individual level studies, which in fact support the efficacy of the potential intervention strategies briefly mentioned in my paper (provided that such strategies are applied in a suitable social context).

As a final note on the mode of publication of variance and dissent in scientific debate, I would have greatly appreciated being given a chance to reply before the publication of a "comment" that so strongly and selectively refers to a previous publication of mine.

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1 Davey Smith G, Ströbele SA, Egger M. Smoking and health promotion in Nazi Germany. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 1994;48:220-3.

2 Brenner H. A birth cohort analysis of the smoking epidemic in West Germany. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 1993;47:54-8.

## NOTICES

**The Fifth International Congress on Trace Elements in Medicine and Biology: Therapeutic Uses of Trace Elements**, February 4-7, 1996. Meribel, France. Organised by the French Society for Study and Research on Essential Trace Elements. Divided into seven sessions: essential role and therapeutic forms of trace elements; trace element supplementation at different periods of age; trace elements in relation to inflammatory conditions, infections and in digestive

diseases; trace elements in endocrinology; pharmacological applications of trace elements; trace elements, bone physiology and bone diseases; epidemiology of trace elements and intervention studies. Satellite symposium: genetic disorders of copper metabolism. Information: Arlette Alcaraz, CHRUG Hôpital A Michallon, Biochimie C, BP 217, F-38043 Grenoble Cedex 9, France. Tel +33 76765484, Fax +33 76765664.

**The 39th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Society for Social Medicine:** Date: 13-15 September 1995; place: Royal Holloway College, Egham, Surrey. Details from Sue Medhurst, Childhood Cancer Research Group, 57 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6HJ (tel +44 1865-310030; fax +44 1865-514254).

## SHORT REVIEWS

**Mothers, Babies, and Disease in Later Life.** D J P Barker (Pp 187; £29.95). London: BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. ISBN 0-7279-0835-9.

An account of one of the most significant advances in epidemiology to date which shows that the nutrition of the fetus and newborn infant has significant effects on the health of the adult and that we must look to the improvement in health and nutrition of girls and young women and mothers during pregnancy if we are to prevent chronic diseases so widespread throughout the western world.

**Western Diseases: Their Dietary Prevention and Reversibility.** Eds N J Temple, D P Burkitt (Pp 462; \$49.50). New Jersey: Humana Press, 1994. ISBN 0-89603-264-7.

International experts explore the causes, prevention, and reversibility of cancer, coronary heart disease, hypertension, and obesity and develop policy proposals out of their findings.

**The Epidemiological Imagination.** Ed J Ashton (Pp 219; £12.99 PB £37.50 HB). Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994. ISBN 0-335-19100-2 PB 0-335-19101-0 HB.

Makes available some of the classics of epidemiology by drawing on the choices of leading contemporary epidemiologists in selecting published papers, both old and new.

**Managing Crisis and Change in Health Care: The Organizational Response to HIV/AIDS.** C Bennett, E Ferlie (Pp 213; £14.99 PB £40.00 HB). Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994. ISBN 0-335-15787-4 (PB) 0-335-15788-2 (HB).

Describes processes of strategic change in the National Health Service in relation to the organisational and managerial response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

**Evaluating the NHS Reforms.** Eds R Robinson, J Le Grand (Pp 288; £9.95 PB £25.00 HB). Newbury: Policy Journals, 1994. ISBN 0-946967-42-3 HB.

An initial evaluation of the claims made for the radical reorganisation of the National Health Service resulting from the 1990 Na-

tional Health Service and Community Care Act and its impact upon the equity of the delivery of health care, based on detailed empirical research by The King's Fund.

**Modern Infectious Disease Epidemiology.** J Giesecke (Pp 263; £14.99). London: Edward Arnold, 1994. ISBN 0-340-59237-0.

The text of this book has been structured to provide an ordered progression through stages of increasing difficulty, starting with simple epidemiological concepts and ending with the epidemiology of HIV/AIDS, in which most of the problems in epidemiology are encountered.

**Measuring Health and Medical Outcomes.** Ed C Jenkinson (Pp 223; £14.95 PB £35.00 HB). London: UCL Press, 1994. ISBN 1-85728-084-9 PB 1-85728-083-0 HB.

A critical review of the theory and methodology of subjective health measurement including the assessment of methods of evaluating change over time, potential uses for very short measures and appraisal of widespread generic measures.

**Seasonal Variation in Health and Diseases: A Bibliography.** T M Allen, A S Douglas (Pp 496; £70.00). London: Mansell Publishing, 1994. ISBN 0-7201 2211-2.

Presents a large collection of references to seasonal variations and to weather and temperature effects in the same connection.

**Community Profiling: Auditing Social Needs.** M Hawtin, G Hughes, J Percy-Smith (Pp 204; £12.99). Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994. ISBN 0-335-19113-4.

Details the process: defining aims and objectives; planning research, collecting, storing, and analysing information; involving the local community; presentation of information; and the development of action plans.

**Current Clinical Topics in Infectious Diseases, Vol 14, 1st ed.** Eds J S Remington, M N Swartz (Pp 316; £59.50). Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1994. ISBN 0-86542-359-8.

Provides critical evaluation of recent advances, placing the information in perspective by defining its present status, pointing out deficiencies and thereby indicating directions for further study and covering bacteriology, mycology, virology, parasitology and epidemiology.

PETER GRIME

## Corrigendum

Birth prevalence of malformations in members of different ethnic groups and in the offspring of matings between them. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 1995;49:171-9.

Several errors crept into the above article after proof reading. In Table 1, the fourth figure in the final column (34.1) should not be followed by four daggers. On the second line of the footnotes to Table 8, the first equation should read 0.05 > p > 0.01. On the final row of Table 9, the third figure (3.65) should be followed by a dagger instead of a plus sign. The page numbers of the seventh item in the list of references should read 102-6.