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Correction

Information in practice: NHSnet—learning from academia

An authors' error occurred in this article by T J Roscoe and M Wells (6 February, pp 377-9). In the table (top of p 378) the first row actually showed the total annual budget of the tertiary education sector and of the NHS (not, as stated, the budget of their computer networks, JANET and NHSnet).

A mistake that changed my practice

The wrong notes

Our first visit to the antenatal clinic was an example of the poor quality service that you hear people complain about frequently in their dealings with the NHS: a 45 minute wait to be seen; being told by the antenatal receptionist to go to the ultrasound reception desk and vice versa. My wife went to the lavatory after the scan and was then asked for a sample of urine; we saw three members of staff who did not wear badges, did not introduce themselves, or ignored me as the father to be.

I wrote a letter of complaint in which I made suggestions on each point that would cost no money to implement but required something that money cannot buy—namely, staff modifying their working practices.

Our second visit was not much better and clearly little had changed. It wasn't until we got home and looked in our patient held maternity records that we realised that the results of another patient had been taken from the clinic notes and stuck in my wife's records. Presumably that day's entry had also been written in the wrong set of hospital notes. Different first name, different date of birth, different address. They got the surname right.

I thought about my own practice. People move house, and with the growing number of telecom providers, change their

telephone number. I started asking parents to confirm their address and telephone number at the start of every consultation. Out of 100 consecutive consultations, there were 14 different telephone numbers and eight different addresses from those recorded in the notes. The numbers may have been higher among the non-attenders, which may explain their absence in some cases. Twice I was about to start writing in notes of patients with the same surnames but different first names. The surnames were right, but they were the wrong notes.

As the only letter from the consultation I write is to the parents, with copies to other relevant parties, it ensures that the parents get the letter I have promised, get the next appointment letter from me or others, and if I need to ring them I do not have the hassle of directory inquiries, ex-directory numbers, and ringing the general practitioner for the number. It takes 30 seconds at the start of the consultation to confirm these details and it can save a lot of time and embarrassment later. A simple quality measure that costs nothing.

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