In this number

Cochrane and history

In this number we continue our series of historically important articles from earlier years of the Journal with a well known paper from 1978 written by Archie Cochrane and colleagues, one of whom is now our Associate Editor. The language of evaluation now includes terms such as "health gain" which were not current when the paper was written, but as a commentary by Klim McPherson points out, the basic questions posed by the historical article are still fundamental for those involved in (public) health policy.

The trials of evaluation

In this number we have reversed the order of the sections in which our papers are customarily presented. First we have the Methods papers, including a systematic review of methods in small trials in depression, and a paper from two of the leading health service researchers in Europe (from The Netherlands) addressing the combined difficulties of inequalities in health, interventions in those areas, and evaluation of the interventions.

Must enquiries be confidential?

The health services research papers include the use of the confidential enquiry approach to hospital admissions. While potentially useful (and possibly very British?) this approach might be seen to concede too readily the idea that clinicians will not collaborate in robust investigations of their behaviour and judgement. How do good practice and evidence based practice fit in here? In contrast, another paper presents information from a group of doctors as patients, where their behaviour has been investigated, with their consent of course. This makes a useful contribution to the whole area of hormone replacement therapy.

Epidemiology from Europe to Asia and the Pacific rim

Differences and changes between east and west continue to be a focus of much public health activity in Europe. One paper traces the experience of migrants from east to west in terms of cancer survival, a subject which draws attention to life long experiences in terms of exposure, diagnosis, and management. Three papers use age-period-cohort analyses in attempting to understand more about problems as varied as asthma mortality (in Australia) and gastric cancer incidence (in Spain). Please note, the first epidemiology paper gives us the important reminder that some public health triumphs are accidental.

Epidemiology past and future

This Journal together with the UK Society for Social Medicine are holding a one day meeting entitled "Epidemiology—past and future" in Manchester on 30 October 1997. Speakers include Mervyn Susser, George Davey Smith, Raj Bhopal, and Alan Silman. The Notices section at the end of the Journal contains further details.

Correspondence and vested interests

Disputes over the validity of epidemiological approaches to answering sensitive issues continue—more in the USA than Europe, it seems. This number includes correspondence which continues the debate about induced abortion and breast cancer. It is hard not to conclude that where there are vested interests of whatever sort—economic, political, social—then methods, results, and interpretations will be disputed. Isn't this what academic rigour and debate are supposed to be about? Now read on...

STUART DONNAN
Editor