Editorial

Changing names—changing disciplines

With this issue the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health makes its debut but it is not in any sense a new journal; it will continue to develop the excellent work done by the British Journal of Social and Preventive Medicine during the last 31 years.

In 1947 when the British Journal of Social Medicine was first issued, J. A. Ryle was Professor of Social Medicine at Oxford, René Sand was the Director of the Institute of Social Medicine in Brussels, Knut Sand was Professor at the Institute of Social Medicine in Copenhagen, and the future for the discipline of social medicine was one of great promise with new methods for the study of aetiology of disease in total populations.

In the political field there were many new proposals for providing medical care to whole communities which in the United Kingdom were to lead to the National Health Service. The experience of maintaining the health of vast armies during the war and the improved health of the civilian populations despite severe deprivation promised a great future for social medicine.

The work of the old Public Health Service seemed to be complete and new vistas for research and for action were to be seen. In this euphoric atmosphere the British Journal of Social Medicine was launched. The editors were F. A. E. Crewe and Lancelot Hogben, the publishers the British Medical Association. Perhaps wisely, the editors did not print an editorial to proclaim their policy, but their Notice to Contributors made clear their intention "To publish work in social medicine although not necessarily by authors of British nationality. Social medicine is that branch of science which is concerned with:

(a) biological needs, interactions, disabilities, and potentialities of human beings living in social aggregates;

(b) numerical, functional and structural changes of human populations in their biological and medical aspects".

The emphasis, therefore, was upon 'social aggregates' and 'numerical description'.

During 31 years the British Journal of Preventive and Social Medicine followed a consistent policy of publishing original work which related to 'social aggregates' based upon sound statistical measurement and it owed a great debt to its many contributors from many disciplines, from many countries.

It is the intention of the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health to pursue a similar policy animated by the same spirit of inquiry and of concern for society that inspired its predecessor. It is the intention to publish original work and also occasional reviews in the field of epidemiology and community health which relate to total populations and which shall be numerically valid.

'Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of disease prevalence in man' (McMahon and Pugh, 1970), and it is important to realize that conceptual and philosophical ideas are inherent in the identification of determinants of disease. So epidemiology is based upon accurate observation of disease patterns in a total population but the epidemiologist must analyse the disease process so as to reach a better understanding of the nature of disease, how it arises and spreads, how it can be controlled or modified, how it can be eliminated.

Community health is a more difficult concept to illustrate, as health has proved to be a word almost impossible to define. The charter of the World Health Organisation put it: 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. By this definition no community could ever be healthy so we pass the responsibility to our contributors over the years to come to demonstrate by their publications what the term means in practice. What we have in mind at this embryonic stage is not only the study of the health state of the individuals in a community, but also the study of the provision of health care, the outcome of treatment of the sick and the prevention of disease in communities. Once again the concepts and analysis of effects will be more important than pure description.

It is our intent to continue the tradition that papers will be accepted 'not necessarily by authors of British nationality', although we will publish papers only in English.

We hope that the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health will provide a forum in which academic scientists and working practitioners of the science of epidemiology, community medicine, or social medicine will be able to publish their findings and to which they will both look for new developments and considered reviews.

Reference