IN THIS ISSUE

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PLENTY OF OPINION AND NOT A LITTLE POLITICS

One of the joys of editing the journal is the surprise that comes from offerings by authors which resonate with your own preoccupations and obsessions. In this issue, there seem to be many of these surprises and delights. Controversy surrounding the “precautionary principle” shows no sign of letting up, Tukker suggests a possible way forward to reconcile different world views of risk assessment and a commitment to ecology. This is timely and important and needs to be taken up.

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In recent years, the concepts of impairment, disability, and handicap have become increasingly blurred to the detriment of public health. R B Jones, in this editorial, passionately makes the case for clarity of language and concepts; and in an omnibus set of 10 perspectives, contributors from around the world offer their reflections on the ideal health minister. A distillation of their ideas could provide a very valuable job description. The question will remain about how these people can be found and whether future governments can be sufficiently imaginative to bring them on board and give them their head, particularly if, as Takano suggests from Japan, the ideal minister of health should be an outsider and not just one of the usual political suspects.

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Sticking to Takano and his group from Tokyo, whose “out of the box” thinking and research is most refreshing, we provide four assessments of their work on greenspace and urban health.

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This month’s Glossary is a welcome contribution on cancer screening.

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Our section on Public Health Policy and Practice includes a practical contribution on sexual health promotion among off street sex workers, and a thoughtful piece from Finland clarifying the relation of age, period, and cohort effects on the functional status of the middle aged and elderly population.

See pages 903, 905

Seven research reports again provide further food for thought on inequalities, with a contribution on some spatial aspects from Spain and an update of the Whitehall II Study from England, and other contributions from the growing body of researchers in this field.

See pages 919, 922

In Theory and Methods, we have reflections on confounding in the evaluation of vaccine effectiveness and of the cost of questionnaire based research in the aftermath of the scandals in paediatric care in the United Kingdom.

See pages 951, 956

The paper from Barrett and Wellings in the *JECH* earlier this year on the complexities of collecting data on marital status in a post-modern age produces a response from A G Gordon in our letters page, who shares with us his marital confusion with some practical suggestions for a solution (appropriately from an address in Love Walk). Seely draws our attention to the historic roots of the debate about milk intake and cardiovascular and other health issues.

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There are no unusual book reviews this month, but some important offerings are subjected to peer observation in the usual way. We are keen to develop the Book Review section to include unsolicited contributions from readers on works of literature and other publications that people feel carry important public health messages. So if you have read an interesting novel on your holidays which deserves an airing in the journal, let us know.

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Finally, in our Gallery this month, we celebrate the contribution to public health in Latin America of Maria Isabel Rodriguez, one of a growing list of female public health pioneers. And in Speaker’s Corner, Luis David Castiel draws our attention to the public health aspects of information technology other than its applications in research and intelligence.

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