

## William Osler and Dorothy Reed

Tony E Seymour

Pathologist, 100 South Terrace, Adelaide, SA, 5000  
tonys@chariot.net.au

TO THE EDITOR: Your readers might be interested to examine the full story of Dorothy Reed's initial encounter with William Osler,<sup>1</sup> and to learn that he later apologised for his initial negative reaction to her expressed intention to enter medical school, and gave her great support. She later said of him: "He was my friend and to me William Osler has always stood for the greatest personality and the soundest medical teaching possible at that time." Some of her unpublished memoirs are included in a book edited by Jill Ker Conway.<sup>2</sup>

1. Van Der Weyden MB. The dilemma of difference [From the Editor's desk]. *Med J Aust* 2002; 176: 197.
2. Conway JK. Written by herself. New York: Vintage Books, 1992: 172-199. □

## The Buddha and the search for evidence

Diego Rosselli

Professor of Clinical Epidemiology, Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics Unit, Universidad Javeriana Medical School, Bogota, Colombia  
rosselli@javeriana.edu.co

TO THE EDITOR: Some of the principles underlying evidence-based medicine (EBM)\* might have been around far longer than we tend to believe. Here is a fragment of one of the 8777 brief suttas (discourses) collected in the *Anguttara-nikaya*, or "Collection of the gradual sayings", one of the oldest Buddhist texts. The Buddha preaches to the Kalamas people:

Yes, Kalamas, you may well doubt, you may well waver. In a doubtful matter wavering does arise. Now look you, Kalamas. Be ye not misled by report or tradition or hearsay. Be not misled by proficiency in the collections [citing the authority of religious texts], nor by mere logic or inference, nor after considering the reasons, nor after reflection on and approval of some theory, nor because it fits becoming, nor out of respect for a recluse (who holds it) . . .

But if at any time ye know of yourselves: these things are profitable, they are blameless, they are praised by the intelligent; these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to profit and happiness — then, Kalamas, do ye, having undertaken them, abide therein.<sup>1</sup>

This sutta shows the importance of mistrusting unquestioned tradition, even before the days of odds ratios, cost-effectiveness ratios or confidence intervals. Perhaps the lesson for innovative modern supporters of EBM<sup>2</sup> would be to concentrate on higher ideals like "profit" (in the

sense of beneficence or prosperity) and "happiness" as the really significant outcomes we should be aiming at.

\*The decision to send this note to the Journal is, of course, evidence-based. The *Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)* is second only to the *BMJ* in publishing the largest number of references indexed under the MeSH term "evidence-based medicine" in English-language journals. On a proportional basis, the *MJA* is at the top of the list: since November 1996 it has published 125 "EBM" articles out of a total of 2553, while the *BMJ* has published 248 "EBM" articles out of 14966 (OR, 3.06; 95% CI, 2.44–3.83). Could it be that *MJA* readers are three times more interested in EBM-related topics than *BMJ* readers?

1. Anguttara-nikaya. Vol. 1, III. Tika-nipata. 7 Maha-vagga, 65 Kalamasutta.
2. Rubin GL, Frommer MS, Vincent NC, et al. Getting new evidence into medicine. *Med J Aust* 2000; 172: 180-183. □

## eMJA Internet Edition

Resources at your fingertips

Search no more! For the latest and best Australian research, authoritative commentary and evidence-based guidelines, look to the eMJA.

[www.mja.com.au](http://www.mja.com.au)

Visit the site and register for updates: we'll keep you posted about new publications in your field.



## MJA ADVERTISERS' INDEX

### Department of Defence

Triservice . . . . . p359

### Pfizer Pty Ltd

Diflucan . . . . . p366

### Schering Pty Limited

Betaferon . . . . . Inside front cover

Diane 35-ED . . . . . Inside back cover

Diane 35-ED prescribing information . . . . p402

Microgynon 20 . . . . . Outside back cover

### Servier

Diamicron . . . . . p397

## The Medical Journal of Australia

### Editor

Martin Van Der Weyden, MD, FRACP, FRCPA

### Deputy Editors

Bronwyn Gaut, MB BS, DCH, DA

Ruth Armstrong, BMed

Mabel Chew, MB BS(Hons), FRACGP, FACHPM

### Kincaid-Smith Editorial Fellow

Jenny Bergen, MB BS, FRANZCP

### Manager, Communications Development

Craig Bingham, BA(Hons), DipEd

### Senior Assistant Editor

Helen Randall, BSc, DipOT

### Assistant Editors

Elsina Meyer, BSc

Kerrie Lawson, BSc(Hons), PhD, MASM

Tim Badgery-Parker, BSc(Hons)

Josephine Wall, BA, BAppSci, GradDipLib

### Proof Reader

Richard Bellamy

### Editorial Administrator

Kerrie Harding

### Editorial Assistant

Christine Tsim

### Production Manager

Glenn Carter

### Editorial Production Assistant

Melissa Sherman

### Librarian and Book Review Editor

Joanne Elliot, BA, GradDipLib

### Consultant Biostatistician

Val GebSKI, BA, MStat

### Content Review Committee

Mark Harris, MD, FRACGP

Adrian Mindel, MD, FRCP, FRACP

Michael Solomon, MB BCh(Hons), MSc, FRACS

John Wilson, MB BS, PhD, FRACP

Jeffrey Zajac, MB BS, PhD, FRACP

### Editor Emeritus

Ronald R Winton, OAM, MB BS, FRACP

### Australasian Medical Publishing Co Pty Ltd

### Advertising & Business Development Manager

Peter Butterfield

### Advertising Coordinator

Stephanie Elliott

The *Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)* is published on the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month by the Australasian Medical Publishing Company Proprietary Limited, Level 2, 26-32 Pyrmont Bridge Rd, Pyrmont, NSW 2009. ABN 20 000 005 854. Telephone: (02) 9562 6666. Fax: (02) 9562 6699. E-mail: [ampco@ampco.com.au](mailto:ampco@ampco.com.au). The Journal is printed by Offset Alpine Printing Ltd, 42 Boorea St, Lidcombe, NSW 2141.

MJA on the Internet: <http://www.mja.com.au/>

None of the Australasian Medical Publishing Company Proprietary Limited, ABN 20 000 005 854, the Australian Medical Association Limited, or any of its servants and agents will have any liability in any way arising from information or advice that is contained in *The Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)*. The statements or opinions that are expressed in the Journal reflect the views of the authors and do not represent the official policy of the Australian Medical Association unless this is so stated. Although all accepted advertising material is expected to conform to ethical and legal standards, such acceptance does not imply endorsement by the Journal. All literary matter in the Journal is covered by copyright, and must not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by electronic or mechanical means, photocopying, or recording, without written permission.

Published in 2 volumes per year.

Annual Subscription Rates for 2002 (Payable in Advance) to: AMPCo, Locked Bag 3030, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012

Individual Subscriptions (includes 10% GST)

Australia—\$A284.90, Medical students (Australia only)—\$A55.00

Overseas Economy Air—\$A396.00, Airmail—\$A539.00

NZ & PNG Economy Air—\$A363.00, Airmail—\$A490.00

Indexes are published every 6 months and are available on request as part of the current subscription.

Single or back issues contact: AMPCo (02) 9562 6666.

Advice to Authors—<http://www.mja.com.au/publicinformation/instruct.html>



27,459 circulation as at  
30 September, 2001



ISSN 0025-729X