

## 'TIS THAT TIME OF THE YEAR

Once more the time for reflection and resolutions is upon us, and, for doctors, this might involve examining our private and professional personae. For many, the professional persona is caught in a spiral of despondency arising from the challenges and conflicts of modern medicine. For a few, professional despair overwhelms the private persona and ends in divorce from either medicine or partner. For others, a career is destroyed by substance abuse or by suicide.

Do the attitudes to and expectations of our profession weigh too heavily on us? Do they make us peculiarly vulnerable to the tensions between our private and professional personae. Do too many of us find ourselves unable to cope?

It seems that the solution lies in periods of solitude and introspection, during which we may explore our professional and private values and judge just how closely these are reflected in our lives — the ultimate goal being to secure individual wellness.

But how can this wellness be sustained? In her essay *The 12 commandments of wellness*, Shay Bintliff, a US surgeon, suggests practising quality through a commitment to learning and acquiring new expertise; fostering a healthy work environment with free communication and praise where it is due; joining professional and other support groups; participating in community activities; maintaining a healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition, exercise and regular quiet times; taking meaningful time away from work for family and friends; dealing with personal anger; sharing our negative feelings with at least one trusted person; approaching each day with a positive attitude; and finally, employing self-compassion by being gentle with ourselves.

Martin B Van Der Weyden

## MATTERS ARISING

### Asylum seekers and healthcare

Philip Ruddock	85
Aamer Sultan, Kevin O'Sullivan	85
Derrick M Silove, Zachary Steel	86
George Halasz, Michael Block, Leon Petchkovsky, Howard Cooper and 20 co-signatories (all psychiatrists)	86
Debra Graves	86
Martin B Van Der Weyden, Ruth M Armstrong, Helen M Randall	87

## LETTERS

### Evidence-based healthcare 10 years on: is the National Institute of Clinical Studies the answer?

Louise V Hall, Allison E Lauder	88
Chris A Silagy (deceased)	88

### COX-2 inhibition and thrombotic tendency

Christopher G Fenn	88
Leslie G Cleland, Michael J James	89

### Liver biopsy in hepatitis C: reassessing its role in 2001

Ian F Yusoff, Lindsay Mollison, Leanne Totten, John Olynky	89
--	----

### Changes in serum folate concentrations following voluntary food fortification in Australia

Jack Metz, Ken A Sikaris, Ellen L Maxwell, Mark D Levin	90
---	----

### The decline in hospital autopsy rates in 2001

Helen E Ward, Belinda E Clarke, Paul V Zimmerman, Michael I Cleary	91
--	----

### How much alcohol is drunk in Australia in excess of the new Australian alcohol guidelines?

Tim R Stockwell, Penny Heale, Tanya N Chikritzhs, Paul Dietze, Paul Catalano	91
--	----

## CORRECTION

### What people say about their general practitioners' treatment of anxiety and depression

( <i>Med J Aust</i> 2001; 175: S48-S51)	69
---	----

## OBITUARY

### Gwendolyn Ruth Nash,

by Felicity Brown, Barbara Overbury and Kate Nash	82
---	----

## BOOK REVIEW

### Guides to the evaluation of permanent impairment. 5th edition,

reviewed by Alex Gandora	82
--------------------------	----

## IN THIS ISSUE . . .

46

## IN OTHER JOURNALS . . .

84

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