LETTERS

National ethics committee urgently needed
David C Whiteman, Penelope M Webb, David M Purdie, Adèle C Green 187

Inappropriate use of hospital emergency departments
Michael K Marks, Daniel Steinfort, Peter L J Barnett 187

Epidemiological modelling (including economic modelling) and its role in preventive drug therapy
Kent R Johnson, Marissa N Lassere 188
Danny Liew, John J McNeil, Anna Peeters, Stephen S Lim, Theo Vos 188

Screening mammography and mortality
Peter C Gøtzsche 189
Alan Rodger 190
Pam H Peters 190

The Australian Health Care Agreements 2003–2008: reform or false dawn?
William Coote 190

Pertussis: adults as a source in healthcare settings
R John Massie, Sultan Altunaji, Renata Kukurozovic, Nigel Curtis 191
Joseph G McCormack, Natalie M Spearing, Robert L Horvath 191

Boundaries of medicine
Grant M Russell 191
Martin B Van Der Weyden 192

BOOK REVIEWS

Physical signs of child abuse
reviewed by Graham V Vimpani 177

Practical guide to geriatric medicine
reviewed by George Szonyi 184

SNAPSHOT

A bitter pill to swallow
Peter A Monksfield, Olivia J H Whiteside, Stuart C A Winter, Nicholas B Steventon, Graham J Cox 189

IN THIS ISSUE . . . 146

BOOKS RECEIVED 179

IN OTHER JOURNALS . . . 186

THE FEMININE TOUCH

The New York Times recently reported the dismissal of a male obstetrician because he was male. Allegedly, his maleness contributed to his inability to attract patients to the practice. In the competitive milieu of US medicine, the female doctor is sometimes exploited as a marketing strategy to attract patients.

Do women bring something special to medical practice? Do their strengths — nurturing, concern, compassion, ability to connect — make a difference?

In How physician gender shapes the communication and evaluation of medical care, US academics Debra Roter and Judith Hall provide some answers. Patients prefer same-sex doctors mostly for intimate health problems. Female doctors’ consultations are longer and contain more “emotionally focused talk, positive talk and psychosocial exchange.” They also use more “facilitating behaviors reflecting attentive listening and showing interest . . . non-verbal cues such as ‘umm-hmm’ and head nodding”. Interestingly, female doctors appear to be “less protective of professional status and the appearance of infallible expertise”, and are more likely to consult colleagues.

But what about Australian graduates? On asking my editorial colleagues what is so special about female doctors, one replied, “We bring better clothes (especially shoes), the gift of multitasking, empathy (being more likely to have experienced being vulnerable, marginalised and other things akin to being ‘a patient’), humility, a more collaborative rather than didactic approach, productive patient–doctor transference, an ability to dissemble (to look fascinated and compassionate at all times), more willingness to take on ‘heartsink’ patients, and we provide balance, as in the real world.”

I rest my case. The female touch is real and apparently universal.

But what about “the male touch”?

Martin B Van Der Weyden