THE SPECIALIST CONSUMER

Not so long ago our community was comfortable using the words doctor, nurse and patient. However, as medicine has adopted the culture of the commercial world, with its emphasis on clinical products and customer focus, some consider that these traditional titles have reached their use-by date.

Now doctors and nurses have become healthcare providers, and patients are known as clients, customers, or consumers. It is argued that the term “consumers” more appropriately conveys the choice that people may wish to exercise in decisions about their health, and the expression “healthcare providers” reflects the current emphasis on teamwork.

But there is a new twist to the tale.

At a recent healthcare policy conference the “consumer” representative was introduced as a “cancer consumer”. My editorial sensitivity was somewhat shaken. The Oxford Concise Dictionary defines a consumer as: “1. a person who consumes esp. one who uses a product. 2. a purchaser of goods or services.”

Was the introduction an unintended slip of the tongue? Did the chairman mean “cancer-care consumer”? Apparently not. The person identified himself as just that — a “cancer consumer”, a survivor of cancer — and went on to describe what “cancer consumers” want.

Are health “consumers” specialising? We already have “research consumers” and “mental health consumers”. Will we now see “cardiac consumers”, “diabetic consumers”, “colorectal consumers”, and so on?

An overwhelming criticism of modern medicine is the dominance of specialism, which has led to fault lines in medicine with the emergence of increasingly isolated specialties, accompanied by their somewhat insular and introspective lobby groups.

Will the same fate befall the consumer movement?

Martin B Van Der Weyden

LETTERS

Management of chronic suppurative otitis media

Alan E Dugdale

David R Brewster

Sophie Couzos, Traven Lea, Margaret Culbong, Reinhold Mueller, Richard Murray

Overweight and obesity in Australia: an underestimate of the true prevalence?

Terry J Coyne, Michael G Findlay, Torukiri I Ibiebele, David W Firman

Adrian J Cameron, Paul Z Zimmet, David W Dunstan, Jonathan E Shaw

Aspirin for cardiovascular disease prevention

Johan H A Janssen, David Henshaw

Joseph Hung

The impact of chronic illness: partnerships with other healthcare professionals

Bruce Hadden

Obstacles to research in complementary and alternative medicine

R Frank Gorman

Edzard Ernst

The regulation of complementary health: sacrificing integrity?

Vivian Lin

BOOK REVIEWS

Military stress and performance.
The Australian Defence Force experience

Reviewed by John H T Ellard

Whiplash and other useful illnesses

Reviewed by Phillip C Vecchio

Oh’s intensive care manual. 5th edition

Reviewed by W Peter Saul

Family focused grief therapy

Reviewed by Brian J Kelly

OBITUARY

Walter James (“Bill”) Skinner

by John J G Bain

SNAPSHOT

“In Milky” urine: a case of chyluria

John R Burnett, Gary G Sturdy, Suzzanne J Smith, Yuli Ten, Michael J McComish

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

IN OTHER JOURNALS . . .

COVER: Photograph courtesy www.canteen.com.au