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Highlights from our 1992 archives

The tagline for this 1992 advertisement for an oral contraceptive was "Triphasil girls are protected against broken hearts". If only it were that simple.



Listening to the patients

To the Editor: The debate about the physician as patient seems to have turned into a debate about hospital-trained versus tertiary-trained nurses. I fear it has little to do with where nurses are educated, but a lot to do with what they are taught, and how they are treated.

The same accusations of an apparent lack of empathy can be directed at many members of the medical profession. The experience of most young professionals in the large teaching hospitals is one of overwork and demoralisation. Each new patient becomes another anonymous face in a working day with too few hours in it.

As well, most young professionals these days have benefited from modern health care by never having had a serious or painful illness, and find it difficult to empathise with their patients.

Finally, they are frequently at the mercy of rude and overbearing senior staff during their training and later — who of us does not have stories of regular verbal abuse by the feared consultant in surgery/medicine/anaesthetics/paediatrics etc?

And these people, apparently universally admired, are our role models as students!

Thus, at graduation, having been thoroughly dehumanised, they are unleashed on the public.

The analogy that springs to mind is that of the abused child becoming the abusing parent.

Our young professionals need to be constantly reminded why they are in the caring professions. They need to be treated with respect themselves, and led by example.

Rude and cruel senior professionals should be known to them only as sad relics of bygone years.

Finally, they need to have time in the working day to actually care for their patients, independent of making the diagnosis and administering the treatment. Only then can they have self-respect to pass on to their patients.

What really amazed me about the letters from the doctors who complained about nursing treatment is that they seemed to believe that this was a new phenomenon. Where have they been all these years, one is tempted to ask?

My patients often complain about the lack of good old-fashioned nursing care in large public hospitals, but they also recognise the incredible workload of the staff.

Could it be, sirs, that your patients have been talking to you and you haven't been listening?

Melissa Buttini
Queensland
6 January 1992

The battle of the couches and the rats

To the Editor: It was touching to find someone still prepared to defend Freudian psychotherapy.

However, Isla Lonie (*Med J Aust* 1991; 155: 843-845) has it all wrong.

The point is not whether it benefits the patient. The salient feature of psychotherapy is that it benefits the therapist.

Freud discovered long ago the perfect formula for an assured income in perpetuity; the little doctor had a sound grasp of commercial principles.

When he was leaving Vienna and concerned about how he would make a living in Britain, a friend said, but of course, he must take some patients with him.

So it was, and he and they settled down comfortably together in Hampstead and continued their lifelong sessions oblivious of the World War starting around them.

Freud may have been a preposterous old fraud and windbag, but you've got to say this for him: he sure could hustle.

Alan N Cowan

ACT

17 February 1992

