

I would like a code of practice to be enforced, including a request to patients that their material may be used with permission – it could be issued to all new patients so that the issue of confidentiality would be made clear on both sides from the outset. Practitioners working at higher levels in the NHS hierarchy have very little supervision; it is difficult to make checks, especially on the practice of psychotherapy and bad habits can often unthinkingly develop or be perpetuated by small groups of people working together, as in some NHS psychology departments.

Therefore some legal safeguards are necessary in order to avoid great distress to the occasional patient who does discover a breach of confidentiality. (In order to try to redress this injustice private and confidential information must then be disclosed to yet another body of people.)

As a conclusion I wish journals such as the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, *Psychotherapy and Medical Psychology* as well as the *Journal of Medical Ethics*

could be made available to a wider readership: people in general are interested and concerned about the issues debated.

SUSANNE STEVENS

37 Monmouth House, Raglan Street,
Kentish Town, London NW5 3BX

Classical medicine v alternative medical practices

SIR

My critics, Mr Pietroni and now Mr Renton, have chided me for stating that medicine is a rational, science-based discipline with responsibilities in teaching, training, allocation of scarce resources and the resolution of ethical conflicts; and for insisting that in these capacities medicine must remain rigorous and dismiss alternative claims unless they respect current epistemological standards; and for

claiming that only those holistic movements that abide and are validated by these standards will cease to be alternative and become recognised therapeutic approaches.

In countering my rationalistic stance with their relativistic one, my critics have judged me wrong, confused, befuddled. But in doing so, they have perhaps outreached themselves, since my arguments were supported by solid authors and fit with important tenets such as Peirce's validation through the scientific community, Popper's demand for falsifiability or Agassi's plea for rationality.

It is philistine to assume self-righteousness on unsettled debates, to disagree through disparagement and to misconstrue arguments in order the better to refute them. Also, I wonder why authors of replies are often allowed to be somewhat less than academically courteous.

MICHAEL H KOTTOW
MA(Soc), MD

Casilla 37, Correo 10, Santiago, Chile