

addition of hydrochloric acid. The authors suggest that in some subjects short-chain fatty acids are excreted as odourless metallic salts; if this mechanism is identified, more effective deodorants might be found.

1. Kanda F, Yagi E, Fukuda M, Nakajima K, Ohta T, Nakata O. Elucidation of chemical compounds responsible for foot malodour. *Br J Dermatol* 1990; 122: 771-76.

Pass and fail rates at Royal College examinations

The General Medical Council has recently made available the pass rates for candidates qualifying at British and Irish medical schools who had sat the registrable examinations of the Royal Colleges, Faculties, and Colleges during 1988-89. We publish the results here along with comparable figures for 1987-88. Trends in pass rates may be assessed by comparing these results with the overall (weighted) rate for the years 1984-87 (which we published individually earlier this year¹). An asterisk against a rate indicates a significantly lower pass rate than for the period 1984-87 (using a chi-squared test, and a nominal significance level of 0.001 to compensate for multiple significance testing). The pass rate for the intermediate examination of the College of Anaesthetists was 36% in 1987/88 and 44% in 1988-89, compared with 38% in the period 1984-87.

| Exam | Primary | | | Final | | |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 1984-87 | 1987-88 | 1988-89 | 1984-87 | 1987-88 | 1988-89 |
| FRCS | 32 | 24 | 33 | 38 | 36 | 40 |
| FRCSSE | 29 | 36 | 26 | 53 | 58 | 53 |
| FRCSG | 39 | 37 | 38 | 48 | 65 | 35 |
| MRCP(UK) | 39 | 36 | 38 | 39 | 34* | 38 |
| MRCGP | .. | .. | .. | 74 | 76 | 76 |
| MRCOG | 56 | 49 | 52 | 61 | 67 | 65 |
| MRCPath | 69 | 50* | 49* | 53 | 55 | 57 |
| MRCPsych | 62 | 65 | 63 | 64 | 70 | 60 |
| FRCR | 67 | 73 | 71 | 52 | 58 | 57 |
| FCAnaes | 59 | 53 | 51 | 30 | 30 | 34 |
| MFCM | 91 | 66* | 46* | 82 | 91 | 79 |

1. Anonymous. Examining the Royal Colleges' examiners. *Lancet* 1990; i: 443.

Gene therapy

The Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy was set up in November, 1989, with the following terms of reference:

"To draw up ethical guidance for the medical profession on treatment of genetic disorders in adults and children by genetic modification of human body cells; to invite and give ethical consideration to proposals from doctors wishing to use such treatment on individual patients and to provide advice to the UK Health Ministers on scientific and medical developments which have a bearing on the safety and efficacy of human gene modification."

The committee is collecting evidence which it will consider in the course of drawing up guidance and would welcome views on any matters relevant to the terms of reference. Responses should be sent to Mrs Sue White, Administrative Secretary, Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy, Room B1210, Alexander Fleming House, Elephant and Castle, London SE1 6BY (telephone 071-407 5522 extension 6980).

Health facts file

The Health Education Authority has produced a series of quick reference guides to health statistics for insertion in 'Filofaxes' and other standard personal files. There are fourteen different guides, each giving information relevant to one of England's fourteen health regions, as well as national statistics. The guides include data (with references) on alcohol and smoking, mental health, disability, notifiable diseases, cancer registrations, mortality, and hospital statistics. *Healthfacts* is available, price £4.95, from the Distribution Department, Health Education, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9TX. Please specify the region.

Voluntary Service Overseas

For many years Voluntary Service Overseas has asked volunteers willing to work in developing countries for a minimum commitment of two years. The organisation is now considering relaxing the rule for doctors and invites any who are interested in an overseas posting for just one year to contact the Enquiries Unit, VSO, 317 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2PN (telephone 081-780 1331).

In England Now

Martin and I shared a flat as medical students, and at long intervals have exchanged bizarre gifts. From the moment I first saw this hat, I knew that it had to be the next gift to Martin, and with his living in the south, and the greenhouse becoming annually more effective, it seemed a particularly appropriate one. It could only be obtained from the United States, and a letter to the firm in Atlanta resulted in a telephone call to be asked whether it was to be of the peaked variety, which US citizens affect when hunting and fishing, or a solar topee. I chose the latter, in tan rather than white, and it arrived a week later. It caused great delight among my friends, and was certainly comfortable on a hot day in the garden.

Eventually, and rather reluctantly, I packed it up and dispatched it to Martin. Later that day there was a message from Martin on the telephone answering machine asking about a parcel alleged to be addressed to him, and from me, about which he had been telephoned by the Leith police, of whom he had formerly known only in a "dismithive capathity". Minutes after hearing his message a friendly policeman arrived on the doorstep and asked whether I had posted a parcel to Chichester, for the postmaster had been in touch with the police because it was emitting a noise and was vibrating. "Oh you need not worry about that", I said, "it is only a hat." This did not seem to make immediate sense to the policeman, so I had to explain that the topee had a window in the front with a little propellor in it for cooling the brow; sadly in packing it up I must have switched from "solar" to "battery"—for there are solar panels on top which work very well, and auxiliary batteries for hot cloudy days—and this it was which had led to understandable alarm in the post office. But who can tell? But for the IRA a postmaster might be able happily to put up with a gentle hum from one of his parcels.

International Diary

A course on **Molecular Biology for Cancer Epidemiologists** is to be held in Lyon on Sept 18-27: Unit for Education and Training, International Agency for Research on Cancer, 150 cours Albert Thomas, 69372 Lyon Cedex 08, France.

An international symposium entitled **Sugarless—The Way Forward** will be held in Newcastle upon Tyne on Sept 19-21: Prof A. Rugg-Gunn, Dental School, Framlington Place, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4BW, UK (091-222 7859).

14th international congress of the **European Association of Poison Control Centres** will take place in Milan on Sept 25-29: Organizing Secretariat, Congress Studio, Via Cappuccio 19, 20123 Milan, Italy (02-861874).

An international symposium entitled **Advances in Neuro-Oncology** is to be held in Sanremo on Sept 26-29: Organizing Secretariat, ISAN 90, Fondazione Giovanni Lorenzini, Via Monte Napoleone 23, 20121 Milan, Italy (02-76002267).

A postgraduate meeting on **Antenatal Care** will be held in London on Thursday, Sept 27: Sally I. Barber, Postgraduate Education Department, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 27 Sussex Place, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RG, UK (01-262 5425 ext 207).

A course entitled **Eating Disorders** is to take place in London on Sept 27-28: Conference Organiser, Conference Office, Institute of Psychiatry, De Crespigny Park, London SE5 8AF, UK (01-703 5411).