



Health care and a new primary medical care model – lessons from the United Kingdom and Australia

I would like to comment on the above article (NZFP 2005; 32: 378–381).

1. I was puzzled by the definition of primary care as 'the immediacy of care...where acute health problems arise.' No mention of the chronic disease management burden, which surely plays a larger role than acute care nowadays.
2. Large practices of 10–15 doctors tend not to be popular with patients.

3. The present UK structure of primary care is not necessarily the answer for New Zealand; ask any UK GP. There are still inequalities of service there, despite it being a free service.
4. After seeing many changes in management structures for primary care in the UK, I have found the effects at the front line, often disappointing and even negative.

James W McCrone MBChB(Edin) MRCP(UK) MRCP(UK)
Tauranga

Disappearing teaspoons

This longitudinal cohort study of the displacement of teaspoons in an Australian research institute revealed that 56 (80%) of 70 discretely numbered teaspoons disappeared during the five months of the study. The half life of the teaspoons was 81 days. The half life of teaspoons in communal tearooms (42 days) was significantly shorter than for those in rooms associated with particular research groups (77 days). The rate of loss was not influenced by the teaspoons' value. The incidence of teaspoon loss over the period of observation was 360.62 per 100 teaspoon years. At this rate, an estimated 250 teaspoons would need to be purchased annually to maintain a practical institute-wide population of 70 teaspoons.

The authors concluded that 'the high level of dissatisfaction with teaspoon coverage identified in our follow-up survey shows that teaspoons are an essential part of office life. Simultaneously, the rapid rate of teaspoon loss shows that their availability (and therefore office life) is under constant assault. Teaspoon displacement and loss leads to the use of forks, knives, and staplers to measure out coffee and sugar, inevitably causing a reduction in employee satisfaction; in addition, large amounts of time may be wasted searching for teaspoons, both factors leading to decreased employee efficiency. The cost of maintaining a workable teaspoon population, estimated at nearly \$A100 (£43; \$75; €63) a year for the study setting alone, must also be considered.'

The publication of this paper was followed by some lively correspondence. I am interested to know if anyone has come across a similar study documenting the rate of disappearance of office ball-point pens. Editor.

Lim MSC, Hellard ME, Aitken CK. BMJ 2005; 331:1498–1500 (24 December), doi:10.1136/bmj.331.7531.1498.