

EDITORIAL

VAN DIE REDAKSIE

Exhibitionism, Black on White

If a teenager has to turn to the lay press to find answers to his or her sexual problems, are we not perhaps failing in our duty? Questions about the most intimate problems are appearing with increasing regularity in the columns of the daily as well as the magazine press. Some of these columns are managed by a medically-trained person, or so one hopes, but many of them are not. In certain instances the questions, often of a frankly medical nature, are answered by, at best, a psychologist, but more often by somebody who has, as only qualification, an enthusiastic admiration of youth and its problems.

Let us take a careful look at this phenomenon. If the letters are written because the teenager in question has been unable to find help and advice in recognized medical circles, we shall have to hang our heads in shame. And let us not be so sure that such failure cannot happen, for every general practitioner will have to admit that there have been times when the practice had become so chaotic that he simply did not have the opportunity to sit down and talk to the obviously distressed youngster in his consulting room. No one can blame the doctor, for we all know what sometimes happens in a busy practice, but the trouble is that it may have taken the young patient days or weeks to screw up his courage sufficiently to face the doctor with his very intimate problems. He might not be able to do so again and therefore he turns to the lay press where, in anonymity, he can voice his fears and hopefully obtain an answer (see our Afrikaans editorial in this issue).

The second possibility lets us, the doctors, off the hook. These letters may be nothing else than pure exhibitionism. It would not be correct to say that they all are, but there can be no doubt that some of the so-called confessions which are appearing in the glossy magazines are very thinly veiled attempts at bragging about sexual prowess, real or imagined. If this is the case, it is again imperative that the letters should either be ignored and not published or be answered by a person competent to do so. No one will accept that a psychologically disturbed person should be treated or advised in any consulting room by anybody other than a highly qualified psychiatrist or psychologist. Yet, if the psychological disturbance is aired in a magazine with a circulation of thousands, it suddenly seems perfectly in order for some well-meaning soul to dispense quasi-medical advice.

There is a third possibility, namely that these salacious letters are not real at all, but are ghost-written in order to titillate and to increase the circulation of the particular publication. If such be the case we come up against an entirely different subject. Here we are dealing with the pros and cons of censorship and not with help offered to disturbed persons. The only medical connotation that could then come into play would be the possibility that the suggestions contained in the letters could spark off undesirable reactions in other readers and that brings us back full circle to our previous editorial under the title 'Corrupt whom?'¹

1. Editorial (1969): S. Afr. Med. J., 43, 1178.

Toegang tot die Dokter

In die Engelse inleidingsartikel in hierdie uitgawe raak ons skrams aan die probleme wat die tienerjarige het om 'n dokter te vind met wie hy of sy lekker uit die hart uit kan praat. Dit is 'n belangrike saak wat ons nie ligtelik van ons moet probeer afskud nie. Vir die geneesheer wat dag na dag met menslike probleme te doen het, hetsy fisies of geestelik, is dit soms moeilik om te beseef hoeveel moed dit vir 'n pasiënt kos om sy bekommernisse uit een te sit. Barker verwys na 'the bluebeard's chamber of a man's privacy'¹ en dit is iedere praktiserende dokter se plig om aan hierdie stelling die versigtige oorweging te skenk wat dit verdien. Ons moet keer dat daaglikse kontak met lyding ons nie afstomp en onsensitief maak vir die helde-moed wat dit die tienerjarige kos om advies te vra nie.

'n Jong dogter kom na 'n spreekkamer vol donkere bekommernisse oor een of ander ginekologiese of seksuele aspek van haar ontluikende geslag. Om kaalkop met die mandjie patats voor die dag te kom, sien sy nie voor kans nie en daarom loop sy wye draaie om haar werklike kernprobleem. Ons verneem van 'n kollega wat so 'n jong meisie van kindsbeen af as pasiënt gehad het. Op 'n dag het sy vir die eerste keer, sonder haar moeder se onderskraging, na die spreekkamer gekom met een of ander skynbaar onbenullige kwaaltjie. Nadat sy ontklee het en die vlugtige ondersoek wat haar klagte vereis het afgehandel was, het die kollega

tog die indruk gehad dat sy nie heeltemal tevrede daar weg is nie en het hy eers later beseef dat sy in alle waarskynlikheid geleentheid wou skep om oor iets anders te praat. Sy insig het te laat gekom want hy het haar nooit weer gesien nie.

Dit gebeur van tyd tot tyd dat 'n huisarts deur 'n wildvreemde jong pasiënt genader word. As die jong man of meisie gevra word of daar nie miskien 'n familie-geneesheer in die agtergrond is nie, is die antwoord òf afwykend òf 'n klinkklare ontkenning van enige ander doktersverband. Heel verstaanbaar is die meeste huisartse ietwat kopsku vir sulke ongebondenenes want bitter ervaring het geleer dat dit 'n gebied is waar slegte skuld te voet rondloop. Maar ons moet uiters versigtig wees om seker te maak dat die keuse van wildvreemde dokter nie doelbewus is omdat die kind nie die moed het om met 'n hoogs emosionele persoonlike probleem na die familie-vertroueling te gaan nie. As so 'n pasiënt nie vertroulike en volwaardige versorging geniet nie sal dit die tipe persoon skep wat aan die ope rubrieke in die lekepers skryf.

Dit is ewe belangrik, met die oog op ons huidige permissiewe neigings, om nie die blasé houding van die jongeling voetstoots te aanvaar nie. Al te dikwels is daardie gesofistikeerde front slegs 'n bedekking vir 'n diepe vrees, en ons moet beseef dat om bang te wees vir die dokter geen skande is nie.

1. Barker, A. (1971): S. Afr. Med. J., 45, 560.

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS : INSTRUKSIES VIR SKRYWERS

The attention of authors is drawn to the revised 'Instructions for Authors' which appear regularly in the *Journal*. The most recent example will be found on p. xxiv of the issue of 10 July 1971. Publication of papers can be expedited considerably if they are prepared in accordance with these instructions.

Die aandag van skrywers word vriendelik gevestig op die nuwe hersiene 'Instruksies vir Skrywers' wat gereeld gepubliseer word. Die jongste voorbeeld verskyn op bl. x van die *Tydskrif* van 15 Mei 1971. Publikasie van bydraes kan aansienlik bespoedig word as hulle voorberei is in ooreenstemming met hierdie instruksies.