End-of-life decisions in Dutch paediatric practice

Sir—We wish to reply to the various responses (Sept 13, p 816) to our July 26 paper on end-of-life decisions in neonatology. Philip Howard refers inaccurately to our data. Among the infants in whom life-sustaining treatment was stopped, the percentage to whom drugs were administered with the explicit intention of hastening death was 14% (8% of 57%), and not 48% as Howard suggests. Furthermore, Howard suggests that only 23% of the neonatologists and 6% of the other paediatricians in our survey felt that decisions to administer drugs with the explicit intention of ending life should be reviewed after the death, but there were another 42% and 59%, respectively, who preferred review both before and after the act. The autonomy Dutch paediatricians are supposed to expect for end-of-life decisions is not reflected in our finding that 75% of the neonatologists and 59% of the paediatricians support review of these acts by a committee not restricted to medical professionals. Transparency of the decision-making process in this field is widely endorsed in our country where medical professionals. Transparency of the decision-making process in this field is widely endorsed in our country where medical professionals.

Aves van der Heide, P J van der Maas, L A A Kollée

Department of Public Health, Erasmus University Rotterdam, PO Box 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, Netherlands; and Paediatric Association of the Netherlands, Utrecht


Sex and examination results

Sir—A G Acheson (Sept 27, p 964) reports that male medical students are at a disadvantage in medical examinations in UK. This is an important issue in terms of strategies in medical education. We studied the association between sex and the examination results in two Japanese national examinations: the national examination for medical practitioners which gives a licence of physician and the national bar examination which gives a licence of legal profession. The proportion of successful applicants in each examination was significantly higher among women than among men (national examination for physician: 93.5% vs 86.3%; national bar examination: 3.6% vs 2.7%).

I suggest that present-day female students are more diligent with regard to examination questions that have correct answers. However, it remains unknown whether sex has a role in solving problems for which there is not necessarily a correct answer, such as the questions physicians face in their daily clinical or research work.

Kozo Matsubayashi

Department of Medicine and Geriatrics, Kochi Medical School, Oko-cho, Kohezu, Nankoku City, 783 Kochi, Japan


Sir—A G Acheson1 and others2 have shown that the gender and ethnic background of medical students affects their pass rates in some medical schools. In the Department of Child Health of the University of Queensland, where students do a 10-week posting in the final year, we have not found a significant difference in the male/female pass rates, but we have elicited other and interesting differences related to gender, age, and ethnic background.

... is not done justice by Margaret White's suggestion that without rigorous legal prosecution any sound practice is impossible.

... has increased the expected number above the 50%, but this does not invalidate the results. For brevity, high means on-and-above the median, and low means below the median.

... compared with female students, male students had a trend towards fewer correct responses (50% men and high scores vs 56% women, p=0.053), significantly more wrong responses (60% men had high scores vs 40% women, p=0.003), and significantly fewer don't know responses (52% men had high scores vs 57% women, p=0.04). Age had no significant effect on correct and don't know responses, but older students had more wrong responses (older students had 62% high wrong responses vs 52% high wrong responses in younger students). The first language had no significant effect on correct and wrong responses, but those whose mother tongue was not English had fewer don't know responses (36% of students with English as mother tongue had high don't know responses vs 47% for those whose mother tongue