

Layman's medicine — a whole new world for the GP

'LISTEN to the patient, and he will tell you the diagnosis,' the pundits of general practice tell us. My patients usually inform me of the diagnosis whether I listen or not, and it is very enlightening.

Did you know, for example, that the commonest cause of chest pain is a corollary, sometimes complicating vagina of the heart? Or that indigestion is often a symptom of acid reflex or a gastric stomach?

Patterns of disease have changed, and most patients today agree with us that their tonsillitis is caused by a virus, whereas in my father's day it was commoner to see the full-blown streptococckeyed throat.

Perhaps the change is due in part to improved methods of treatment. Asthma, for example, is now much more easily controlled with the 'Rentokil inhaler', and constipation, if not adequately dealt with by torpedoes *per rectum*, should respond to Flo-bo-go granules.

But improved self-diagnosis is mainly the result of the greater sophistication of the modern patient. What doctor could have spotted the cause of the abdominal pain suffered by a patient clerked by one of my fellow students? The gentleman explained that he was suffering from a double typhus-rupture complicating a longstanding elephant typhus.

Listen to the patient, and he will introduce you to a whole new world of medicine!

Dr Jon Garvey