

## Enlightened new breed?

Dr Jon Garvey wonders about the 'emergence' of vocational trainees.



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THERE HAS been an irritating trend in the medical press recently towards eulogising that new breed of man, the vocational trainee in general practice.

Trainee conferences are reported with all the attention given by "Pravda" to the ruminations of the Supreme Soviet while elderly trainers have letters published claiming that their trainees have some very bright ideas, and can in fact, be quite useful to have around the practice.

But it all sounds, to me, suspiciously like those 'kids today aren't as bad as they're made out' statements made by middle-aged public figures in the 1960s to exonerate the behaviour of the large crowds of youths who were beating the hell out of each other on Brighton beach.

'Our youth have a refreshing new outlook on life,' they said, 'and reject the outworn modes of our materialistic generation.'

Meanwhile, the aforementioned youth were busy popping packets of purple pills purveyed by middle-aged pedlars, who were making a killing. The same things are being said and done today.

And so I don't much go along with the idea that GP trainees are a radically new force in medicine. If a few of them have good ideas it should hardly surprise us; after all, by the time you get to be a trainee, you're pushing middle-age anyway, so if you've not had any ideas by then you probably never will.

During my recent traineeship — or is it traineehood, or trainee-dom?—the knife-edge of our keenly-trained minds was frequently dulled by long nights spent sewing episiorrhaphies, or treating the people who brought their week-old headache to casualty at 4am, so our Monday afternoon course sessions were not always the breeding-ground of original thought they might have been.

Indeed, the best thought any of us had was to suggest retiring to the pub for lunch.

One or two of our number tried to inject some venom into the proceedings by running discussions on how trainees were, to summarise their case, overworked and underpaid.

The rest of us, who were remarkably content with our lot, dealt with this by putting them on the local committee.

I would not wish to give the impression that my trainee period was an idle or boring time. Far from it. But most of us were simply relatively hardworking and, possibly, competent doctors involved in learning a lot of new skills, and formulating our philosophies of general practice. I would think most trainees are the same.

There are, naturally, men of ideas. Ours was the chap who managed to get a computer 'asteroids' game installed in the hospital mess — but it is as well to consider that as more doctors become trainees, although we shall acquire some great minds, we shall also gain a proportional number of clods.