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### You too can write

I was pleased to see in the May issue of *World Medicine* another article suggesting how one should write articles. There is a whole genre of such pieces in medical journalism; I have seen examples in *Pulse*, in *Doctor*, and even in the prestigious pull-out pages of *General Practitioner*.

I have had it in mind for some time to pass on some hints on the best way of writing such articles, as the job is often badly done. The worst fault authors fall into is to give the impression that the task of creating masterworks is something that any medical hack can achieve. Do not the writers of such falsehoods realise that arousing the dormant talents of doctors with literary pretensions can only lead to their own redundancy? Periodicals cannot simply expand the number of pages to accommodate extra copy, although *Pulse* has a jolly good try. Something has to go, and it could be your column next, mate, and mine. Far better to point out how easy you find it to rattle off 1,500 words during *Top of the Pops*, how you think of ideas for articles as you sit down to type, how you used to enjoy those long childhood discussions with W.H. Auden, and so on.

As I said, I had intended to write an article about writing articles about writing articles. But when I looked for some guidance in doing so, no-where could I find an article with advice on writing articles about writing articles which tell you how to write articles.

### Common bond

Hitherto I have held my peace. But the decision of the British Medical Journal to refuse to publish an advertisement submitted by Dr John Hall's evangelical christian practice in Bristol, which sought a partner "sharing our outlook", deserves nothing but derision. The Commission for Racial Equality, on whose advice the decision was taken, does not merit even that. I cannot for the life of me see how it can be construed as racist to look for a partner of a faith of Asian origin, which was first embraced by Jews, and which currently has its major growth area in Latin America and South Korea, closely followed by large areas of black Africa.

Such an advertisement might quite reasonably be accused of religious discrimination, though those that state "family planning essential" are no less

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biased against Catholics. Anyway, religious discrimination is not against the law; if it were, ap-pointing the Archbishop of Cant-erbury would be an interesting exercise indeed.

I have never thought it essential for christian doctors to cluster together in a "christian practice" in order to apply their faith to everyday life. Nevertheless, I work in just such a practice, and I am sure that we only manage to encompass such a wide range of personalities and clinical approaches among seven doctors and a proportional entourage of staff, because we share a common faith. I accept that we might manage just as happily if we were all members of the local hunt, or ardent Marxists, but we would still need some unifying factor to avoid factions and frictions developing; a National Front activist in a People's Health Collective would not make for a happy working atmosphere. As it is, we can cheerfully vent any frustrations by accusing each other of being raving pentecostalists or Anglican twits, and everything runs smoothly most of the time. I'm sure our Indian christian trainee would be pleased to verify this.

Furthermore, it only seems fair to warn prospective job candidates just what they're letting themselves in for. Some doctors might not feel at ease in a practice like ours, what with compulsory bible studies every lunch-time, insistence on all new patients being baptised, FP10s ousted in favour of laying on of hands, and so on.

In all seriousness, if in this country it is held to be racist to wish to work with people of a similar philosophy, then we are in deep trouble. One can foresee a time when an unguarded remark by some country parson that "None shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven but by Jesus Christ" will lead to a charge by the Commission for Racial Equality of incitement to racial hatred.

Well, maybe it is... and then again, maybe it ain't.

### The good life?

Chelmsford is not the sort of place that people make a point of visiting. Even the inhabitants, by and large, came here by accident and forgot to leave. This makes it very difficult keeping in touch with our friends. Indeed, our main contact is via *World Medicine*, which is read by accountants, freelance broadcasters and even vicars; everybody, in fact, except doctors, who generally won't have it in the house on the grounds that they were once insulted in it, or that it is anti-semitic. Nevertheless, we recently received news that a veterinary friend of ours has all but abandoned the cut and thrust of twentieth century life,

bought a smallholding, and become all but self-sufficient.

The idea fires the old imagination. After all, do I not see in my daily work examples of people poisoned by the very synthetic garbage I myself consume? Meat made of hydrolysed beans, breakfast cereals less nutritious than the packet, vegetables harvested at the peak of their God-given goodness and then mummified. If you boil fruit with sugar, you get jam which will keep for years, and yet you can't buy jam without glucose syrup, pectin, sodium citrate, preservatives and two or three different artificial colours.

Furthermore, we have just moved to a select neighbourhood (we know it is select because all the dustbins have wheels) and we have our own slice of the Good Earth waiting to yield up its natural bounty. A lot of stones, mind, but picking them all up will give us an appetite.

We could keep a cow. Sounds ambitious, but it's not. The celebrated William Cobbett, in his *Cottage Economy* of 1822, reckons any householder worth his salt can do it. The main effort, I suppose, would be growing food to keep it. Let's see what Cobbett says. . . "We will suppose the land to have five complete diggings, and say little about the simple matters of sowing and planting, hoeing and harvesting, all of which are a mere trifle... An able labouring man will dig 12 rods in a day. Here are 200 rods to be digged, and here are little less than 17 days of work at 12 hours a day, or 200 hours' work." Hmm.

What about some real ale, then? You can forget all these new-fangled home-brewing kits, all cans and chemicals. No, Cobbett tells you how to make real real ale, All you need is... "a copper that will hold 40 gallons at least, a mashing tub to contain 60 gallons, an underbuck to go under this for the wort to run into, a tun tub, a couple of coolers.. .", and then, of course, your malt, your hops, and your yeast. I know it sounds a lot, but we're not making Watney's here, you know.

What else could we do, then? Keeping rabbits? Three does and a buck, says *Cottage Economy*, will give you a rabbit to eat for every three days in the year, for very little work. But Cobbett didn't have to contend with my family defending the lives of their cuddly bunnies against me.

This self sufficiency begins to sound a bit too much like hard work. I suppose it would give you an appetite for any food you did manage to produce. It makes me hungry just thinking about it. Perhaps I'll just nip out and get a Chinese take-away. ■