admittedly flawed, sociological and statistical study of suicide rates as an index of pathological forms of the division of labour. This stems from a positivist desire to study rates, rules and types of social phenomena rather than enquiring about (unknowable) individual intentionality. This is one solution to a dilemma not unknown to psychiatrists attempting to make sense of phenomenological data through the use of epidemiology and operational criteria.

KEITH LLOYD

Bethlem Royal Hospital
Beckenham
Kent BR3 3BX

Reference

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There are none so double-blind . . .

SIR: Oxtoby *et al* (*Journal*, November 1989, **155**, 700–701) raise important points in their significant and elegant article.

Surely journal editors should follow the policy they imply? No article should be accepted for publication, which includes the claim to have been a 'double-blind' drug trial, unless it contains clear data establishing the validity of that claim. It is decidedly odd that hitherto, editors have required only the *simulation* of double-blinding, rather than the reality of how the technique is effectively used.

The experience reported by Oxtoby *et al*, of failing to gain publication of their valid and important critiques, raises another most important caution concerning the scientific literature. In my experience there is in practice a significant rate of rejection of articles and letters critical of substantial methodological flaws in studies; a rejection rate that is unrelated to the truth or relevance of the criticisms, or to the quality of the written submission. There may be several reasons for this. Editors and reviewers (consciously and unconsciously) might not be well disposed to submissions that demonstrate serious flaws in articles they have accepted for publication; especially if the authors of the faulty articles are significant establishment figures.

Another problem arises from the attempts to seek 'peer' review. Items obviously need to be reviewed by experts. However, especially within some fields, a regular ring of reviewers develops, whose personal and emotional investment in particular views lead them to urge rejection of contrary ones. One should be very cautious of using reviewers too prominent or dominant within their field.

This was well demonstrated recently, when this *Journal* (Simpson, *Journal*, October 1989, **155**, 565) published a letter in which I criticised some of the many flaws in the burgeoning fad literature on multiple personality disorder (MPD). I have since received numerous sustaining and supportive letters from American readers, delighted to have seen criticism of this sacred cow of the psychosocial literature actually appear in print. In North America, it is almost impossible for such critical views on MPD to appear in print because all such submissions are reflexly sent for review to a small circle of devotees of MPD, who reject them.

As scientists, authors, reviewers and editors, we should value sincere and informed critics far more highly, for they are a valuable but endangered species. Our disciplines need to treasure iconoclasts and there are more than enough of these about.

MICHAEL A. SIMPSON

PO Box 51,
Pretoria 0001
South Africa

Malaria presenting as atypical depression

SIR: We report here a case of a patient with cerebral malaria who presented in the UK with a hysterical stupor occurring in the context of an atypical depression.

Case Report: A 30-year-old woman was admitted under Section 2 of the Mental Health Act (1983) following a domiciliary visit. She had been stuporose for 48 hours and had stopped eating and drinking. On returning from a day trip to the seaside she had been quite unable to get out of the car because of her semistuporose condition and resisted any attempts to move her, even by force. Prior to this episode she had complained of bouts of extreme tiredness, depression and irritability for about four months. She also had sleep reversal, with daytime sleepiness and nocturnal insomnia. There was no weight loss, but appetite was impaired. Her family history was negative for all psychiatric disorders, but seven years previously the patient had taken an overdose following the break-up of a relationship. Early life and schooling were unremarkable and she had been successful in her career as an information officer. At the time of the onset of depression, she had been in dispute with a girlfriend with whom she had shared a flat. In addition, six weeks prior to admission she had got married and reported some difficulties in forming a relationship with her stepson. It was thought that her recent life events were sufficient cause for her depression. Her general practitioner (GP) had started treatment with imipramine with a good initial response. However, she stopped the drug because of side effects and this appeared to coincide with the onset of deterioration in her clinical state and the onset of stupor.

During the admission to hospital, she took to her bed for two days every 3–4 days, complaining of severe exhaustion