present a relatively objective scientific study, rather than making the much needed plea for action to be taken about this population—a plea that I have already endorsed more informally elsewhere (Priest, 1973, 1975). It is in these reviews that I have covered some of the more recent literature (which tends to be of this action-demanding kind rather than being relevant surveys of representative samples).

I should like to try to follow up Beresford's suggestion and carry out a similar study in the general population—comparing the background prevalence of psychiatric symptoms there with rates found in the sample that presents to the psychiatric services. It would be a rather more expensive project, and so far I have been unable to get the money to fund it.

Finally, the NAB publication *Homeless Single Persons* did give the results on a survey of a representative sample of roughly 30,000 dwellers in common lodging houses, etc. Whether the title refers to this (as I assume) or a sub-section of the population (as Beresford suggests) is probably a matter of opinion. I think that we would both agree that the residents have a roof rather than a home.

ROBERT G. PRIEST

Professor of Psychiatry,
University of London

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MONOSYMPTOMATIC HYPOCHONDRIASIS, ABNORMAL ILLNESS BEHAVIOUR AND SUICIDE

DEAR SIR,

I enjoyed Dr Bebbington's well-documented paper on the above topic (*Journal*, May 1976, **128**, pp 475–8) and I would agree with his statement that 'the treatment of hypochondriasis is difficult'. In fact, so far as psychotic cases are concerned, treatment has conventionally been regarded as well-nigh hopeless.

Dr Bebbington's paper went to press just before the appearance of a paper on monosymptomatic hypochondriasis published by Dr Joyce Riding and myself (1) in which we describe the striking response in five cases of this disorder to treatment with pimozide. There are, so far as we know, no previous reports of pimozide being used in this way.

Since coming to Canada, I have seen one other case which has responded just as convincingly to the same drug:

A man aged 49 was admitted to the Psychiatric Department, Toronto General Hospital on 25 February 1976, complaining that he smelled unpleasantly because of a leakage of urine. He was convinced that his perineum and legs were soaked in urine, although there was no objective evidence of this or of any unpleasant odour. The symptoms had developed gradually over the previous six months and he was very distressed by them. He could not be convinced that he was mistaken, and he wanted physical treatment, though he accepted admission to the psychiatric unit. He was not clinically depressed and showed no evidence of thought disorder or of significant personality deterioration. Physical examination was essentially negative.

Three days after admission, pimozide 4 mg in the morning was commenced, and during the ensuing seven days his symptoms gradually abated. He was discharged home two days later and returned to work after a short period of convalescence. He has remained well since, except that when he drinks heavily he becomes convinced for a time that he is again leaking urine, though he does not complain of any smell.

I would therefore temper Dr Bebbington's hitherto-justifiable therapeutic pessimism by suggesting that cases of monosymptomatic hypochondriasis of psychotic degree should certainly be given a trial of pimozide.

ALISTAIR MUNRO

Department of Psychiatry,
Toronto General Hospital,
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1L7

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1. RIDING, J. & MUNRO, A. (1975) Pimozide in the treatment of monosymptomatic hypochondriacal psychosis. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, **52**, 23–30.

NEW LONG-STAY PATIENTS IN A HOSPITAL FOR MENTAL HANDICAP

DEAR SIR,

Dr Spencer (*Journal*, May 1976, **128**, pp 467–70) concludes his paper '. . . hospital is the only place with staff and resources to receive and help many mentally handicapped persons whose management is beyond the capability of their families and the local facilities of the Social Service Department . . .'.

The data presented in his paper only demonstrate that, at present, the existing hospitals *receive* clients, i.e. that consultants *transfer* clients into existing hospitals. What is missing is data relating to:

A. The current problems of:

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