

Correspondence

Although it is not the policy of the Quarterly to publish correspondence, the Editorial Board, in the interest of resolving a long-standing dispute regarding a book review in the October 1971, Part I issue of the Quarterly, has authorized the publication of the following two letters:

From Dr. David Wolfers, dated 26 July 1972:

"The issue of October 1971, Part I of the Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly has recently reached my desk. It contains a review by Charles Arnold of *Postpartum Intrauterine Contraception in Singapore*, edited by me. This review, which is unrelievedly destructive, contains many points of valid and penetrating criticism to which neither authors nor editor has any right to object.

"It also, unfortunately, contains a group of direct and unequivocal mis-statements which reflect most grievously on my personal professional competence. So far as I know I have never met Professor Arnold and I am therefore quite at a loss to understand the motive for this unfair attack. I refer particularly to the paragraph on page 543 dealing with the central 70-page chapter entitled 'The Epidemiology of acceptance of postpartum intrauterine contraception.' Your reviewer dismisses the contents of this chapter in these words:

I shall not discuss the data on the section on Epidemiology of IUD Acceptance except to make three comments. The data displays are largely "numerator analysis" (after Fredericksen and Ravenholt). One would hope for wider use of the population at risk idea in the analysis, but it is generally absent. As a result one is uncertain about the proportion of population participation in the program even in terms of the total postpartum group during the period of this report. A second major criticism of the analysis is its failure to utilize statistical controls. For example, age, parity and maternal educational levels should be regarded as minimum statistical controls when examining any set of fertility data, yet the authors have not done so. Rather, univariate analyses without controls are generally employed. Finally, the choice of data displays and tabular construction were uneven. Frequently Wolfers would repeat tabular data in graphic format in the same chapter. One or the other would have sufficed.

“The chapter contains in all some 57 tables of data and 10 graphic presentations. Not one of the data displays is of the ‘numerator analysis’ type of Fredericksen and Ravenholt and, with the exception of some preliminary tables and appendix tables, in both cases presenting analyses of the populations at risk, all the tables are constructed to show acceptors of programme services as proportions of the corresponding populations at risk.

“There are no examples whatever of univariate analysis without statistical controls with the exception of one or two examples included explicitly to demonstrate the fallacies which derive from this practice.

“The ten graphic representations which are included to provide a visually readily assimilable illustration of points considered either particularly interesting or particularly suitable for such presentation are, as is correct and customary, for the most part supported by the numerical data to which any reader is entitled.

“My colleague, Professor Ratnam, comes off almost worse. He (and I and the copy editor) are severely castigated for failing to suppress a medical curiosity picture of a keloid scar on a child’s forehead, the subscription of which your reviewer falsely describes as ‘ascribing the scar to an *in situ* (IUD) pregnancy.’ In fact, the subscription makes no ascription of cause but does make it clear that the IUD was not *in situ* during the pregnancy.

“There are other critical forays in the review (particularly that referring to the last chapter) which I believe would be very difficult indeed to defend, but they fall well within the reviewer’s very wide prerogative and it would be improper for me to contest them. I cannot, however, allow to pass in a review which, in 190 pages of text, cannot find anything sufficiently innocuous even to damn with faint praise, the several total inversions of fact to which I have referred.

“I would ask you to take appropriate steps to rectify these errors.”

From Dr. Charles B. Arnold, dated 16 March 1973:

“I read with interest Dr. Wolfers’ letter of July 26, 1972 to the *Quarterly*. I regret that he has taken my comments so personally because there was no such personal attack intended or implied. My remarks were, rather, directed toward the book and the data collection-analysis—and inferences it represented.

“I will stand behind my comments, however. I greatly regret that in disagreeing with my remarks Dr. Wolfers did not adopt a more scholarly approach. I believe his letter leaves me virtually no avenue for an objective reply. His next to last paragraph, for example, suggests, I believe, some misunderstanding of the entire book reviewing process.”