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Bulletin Editor

We're all doomed!

Now you have to read that with a thick Scottish accent as the wonderful actor John Laurie always said it in *Dad's Army* – grim with a foreboding told-you-so subtext. But are we? I suppose in one way we are: as the great economist John Maynard Keynes said “in the long run we are all dead”. Doom and gloom are certainly abroad around pathology labs right now, as the festive cheer wears off. But do remember that in *Dad's Army* at least, Private Frazer's lament never actually came true.

The spotlight, whether we like it or not (we don't) is finally on what pathology costs. It takes a while for a spotlight to settle on its target. In medical microbiology we banged on and on for *decades* about hospital acquired infections and MRSA and *Clostridium difficile* only for someone in charge to finally take notice and for the spotlight to fix on us in the late 1990s. Now we have MRSA and *C diff* targets and inspections and all sorts of bureaucracy and hassle to contend with – and it is mostly our own fault.

Now it is pathology's turn to be lit up for minute inspection. Snip, snip, snip. Cuts, cuts, more cuts, 20% if you please. Despite 5–10% workload growth every year! It's very tempting to put one's head in the sand at these times and hope it will go away. You never know, a massive asteroid strike might sort out our priorities if not us. Or bird 'flu finally wipes us all out. But don't count on an easy get out. These things might indeed happen eventually but the spotlight is on us now. Who understands pathology better than the Department of Health or even your local hospital? Why us pathologists of course. We have a responsibility to our patients, our staff and the local community to keep their pathology service fast, effective, reliable and safe. So we better engage with all this to optimise any potential outcomes, emphasising quality and effectiveness and not just efficiency. If we don't, efficiency will doubtless win. So I'm afraid 2010 is set to be a more than usually challenging year. 2011 isn't looking any better.

Time to change the subject I think. In this country the weather is always a good topic. Seemingly going against the grain of global warming in the UK we've had (and still have as I write this) a very cold, “classic” winter, with snow on the ground at Christmas in many parts and an unusually frequent need to scrape thick ice off car windows to allow a slow journey to work. I've lived and worked in Canada, Antarctica and in Aberdeenshire so I'm pretty used to this kind of cold snowy

weather and welcome it rather than the usual damp grey days most Decembers bring. Luckily it was a bit warmer in November during National Pathology Week 2009. Pathologists braved the elements – manning outdoor stalls in the lashing rain or standing in draughty supermarket foyers engaging with passers-by. Bring pathology to the people! Yee-hah! And that's what we did. Read all about it within these pages.

There's other good things in this issue. The book review section is big, with a lot of books reviewed, both pathological and ones such as *Don't Swallow Your Gum and Other Medical Myths Debunked*. Must get that one – did they do a randomized controlled trial of gum swallowing I wonder? Probably not ethical I guess. Unlike our newish Ethics section which has an article I helped write about patient consent and how it relates to the choice of laboratory tests. I had always thought that the consent bit stopped with the GP or clinician who approached the patient for the sample. Not a bit of it. We're involved if we decide to change the test requested or add on extra ones. We may go too far though, despite being well-intentioned. Remember what the road to hell is paved with? Never mind that but I would be pleased to hear your views on this article – the President has already given his. But do you agree with him? Can you provide counter examples? Do you think it's nuts? Or obvious common sense? We in the publications team are touchingly keen on letters and some, indeed, any interaction with our readers. So please, please don't hesitate to get in touch, by post or by email to me at publications@rcpath.org.

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