

health group latest

The health group report in the last newsletter was some three months out of date by the time it appeared. (N.B. This is not meant as a criticism of the editors - as none of us has edited a newsletter we wouldn't dream of criticising.) By then we had already given the world 'In defence of the NHS'. On journalistic advice we brought forward the publication date to August 31, the day before the British Association meeting, thereby getting ourselves more publicity including reports in several national newspapers and interviews on the radio. To date we have sold nearly 1700 of our 2000 copies, which can be obtained from us, price 50p plus 15p for postage ~~etc.~~ (etc. = envelopes at 2p each). The British Association meeting was, as we had feared, not one of our finest hours, and the only outside publicity we obtained was that the New Scientist reported a snide remark made about us by the Chief Scientist of the DHSS. Birmingham Science for People(BSSRS) group prepared and handed out leaflets about several controversial sessions, and we provided material for one about our pamphlet.

Our collaboration with the SMA Pharmacy Group has taken the form of working with one of their members, Jerry Shulman, who is busy gathering information about over the counter drug sales. Martin Bland spoke to them at a seminar which was attended by seven people, most of whom were the other speakers.

We held one of our rare all day meetings in Cambridge on October 22. One of the main topics for discussion was the fate of 'RAW(P) deals', our technical critique of 'Sharing Resources for Health'(the 'RAWP' report) and 'The RAWP trick', the non technical summary of our arguments. It was decided to produce 'RAW(P) deals' in duplicated form as we felt that while a number of people have asked us for it, its potential audience is fairly limited, to abandon 'The RAWP trick', and to work on the wider implications of resource allocation as our next project. David Jones has now done the final editing of 'RAW(P) deals' and NUPE offered to photocopy it for us. It is just about to become available at a price of 25p to cover postage (and, of course, the cost of the envelope).

In the course of the discussion on 'The RAWP trick', it was proposed that we affiliate to the National Coordinating Committee against the Cuts. We decided not to align ourselves to this, or for that matter, any other sectarian organisation, but to listen sympathetically to any requests for help with specific cuts problems, and decide, on the merits of each, whether to get involved.

We also discussed the problem of the length of our mailing list, which, with nearly 70 names, was becoming very cumbersome for a working group. So we decided to send a form which people had to return if they wanted to remain on the health group list. It was decided to make it clear that people should only ask to go on our list if they want to get actively involved in the work of the group. We hope that those who don't will be able to keep in touch with our doings through this newsletter. This clearout has now been done. If anyone has found themselves unwillingly and inadvertently purged, please contact me.

Having started with the idea of the wider implications of resource allocation, we have found it difficult to clarify the aims of our next 'magnum opus'. It was in fact suggested that there should not be one, but that we should concentrate on helping and working with people and organizations who asked us to do so. However, we decided that it was important to have a group activity as well. After two meetings, with the discussion at the second being slightly less confused than at the first, we have decided to get together data on the social and environmental causes of health, the development of medical care (effective or otherwise) in relation to this and the way resources for medical care are allocated. It has also been suggested that we should try to document how approaches such as preventive medicine, community care and cost effectiveness which we would support in principle, are taken over by the system and used

in rather different forms. By the time this newsletter appears, we hope to have evolved a moderately coherent synopsis to circulate to people and ask them which bits they are going to volunteer to write.

One of the groups which have approached us for technical assistance is the health subcommittee of the Chilean Committee of Human Rights who are trying to get the question of Chile's health under the junta raised at the World Health Association. They have got some English medical notables lined up to do this and have asked us to help them analyse the large quantity of data they have got together to brief these people with. We have decided that this work should not be confined to the health group and so it is now going to be discussed at the Radical Statistics AGM on March 11. For copies of the most recent version of the data please contact Adela Bass, 39 Belgrave Gardens, London NW3.*

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* People returning the AGM form on the back of this issue will receive a copy automatically.