

Doctors and ethics

Sir, On the back of criminal activity by a single surgeon, admitted to medical school in about 1975, Professor John Ashton (letter, May 1) implies that an undefined number of today's doctors lack ethical values, and that this is in some way due to them having been admitted to study medicine directly from school. On this basis he advocates complete revision of the medical school admissions procedure.

He is correct in saying that annual appraisal and revalidation has had little effect on most doctors' practices. It is intended to address issues of continuing professional development, which the vast majority of doctors participate in as a matter of course, rather than issues of negligence or criminality. When introduced it was made clear by doctors that it would not have stopped Harold Shipman,

and the Ian Paterson case is testament to this. What it does show, however, is the folly of introducing massive, expensive and time-consuming change in reaction to a single unrepresentative case.

Morals and ethics already form a significant part of the selection and continuing assessment of today's medical students. I fail to see how this aspect of their training will be helped by obliging applicants to acquire an additional expensive university degree in addition to five or six years of medical education.

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