omission of considerations of early diagnosis and early management of radiation injury.

In relation to carcinogenesis, while there is a clear consensus that this is a stochastic effect of radiation exposure, the authors would struggle to provide convincing epidemiology to support their statement that ‘a small increase in exposure to a large population would cause a long term increased incidence of carcinoma’. The one referenced assertion of hazard in the paper, that spent fuel pools (more often referred to as ponds in UK) could cause a disaster on the scale of Chernobyl is at best over simplistic. The most clear health consequence of that accident is of course childhood thyroid cancer from released radioactive iodine and spent fuel events could not have such a result.

The paper does identify the stages of national arrangements for incidents involving radioactivity (NAIR) response, but makes no mention of the identification of designated hospitals for receipt of casualties contaminated by radioactive material, or who may have been exposed to high levels of radiation. Similarly, the paper makes no mention of intervention in the accident/incident situation and the basis of decision making for the implementation of urgent early countermeasures to protect the public from stochastic risk is left unaddressed.

Few would argue with the conclusion of the paper, and in terms of chemical and biological events, the text has much merit. I would, however, suggest that in the radiation field, there is a need for further coverage if occupational physicians are to have even an introduction on the terrorist threat.

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References

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References

Despite the wealth of sound advice including the Faculty of Occupational Medicine’s Guidelines for the Management of Back Pain at Work [2] inappropriate investigation and treatment are still all too frequent. Chris Keeling-Robert’s article in January’s Talkback [3] is just one of the many ways that BackCare has campaigned to improve access to information, research and individual support for back pain sufferers over the last 35 years. Supporters of BackCare are regularly updated with information in this area and can contribute to attempts to communicate these issues as they relate to work.

Your readers might also be interested to join the million or so people who visit BackCare’s website (www.backcare.org.uk) each year or to suggest to their patients, customers and clients that they make use of BackCare’s Helpline (Tel: 0870 950 0275) or its many publications — the most well-known being Guide to the Handling of People [4] the 5th edition of which is being launched next month.

During BackCare Awareness Week (11–17 October 2004) [5] we will be focusing on ‘Posture and Back pain’ with a particular emphasis on ergonomics in schools — a long forgotten target of preventive medicine [6].

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References

doi:10.1093/occmed/kqi078

Back pain
Dear Sir,

Your review in the Monitor [1] highlights the continuing need for vigilance in treating people with back pain.

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References

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Pabulum
Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for increasing my personal lexicon with the word ‘pabulum’ [1].