Reply

Sirs,

Low and Low make two interesting points in their letter.1

The first concerns equity pre- and post-access to services. The clinical indicators within QOF are designed to reflect the care provided to those patients on the chronic disease registers, and in this respect, they are purely a post-access measure. Low and Low are correct in saying that an absence of inequity in post-access coronary heart disease (CHD) care does not necessarily mean that there is equitable access onto the CHD register in the first place. However, our finding of a lack of an association between quality of post-access CHD care and deprivation at a practice level is still interesting and is contrary to patterns shown by previous research.2

With regard to the second point, we did not attempt to assess the equity of access to the QOF CHD registers. Unfortunately, the ‘true’ prevalence of CHD in any GP practice population is unknown, which makes measuring the equity of access to a disease register difficult. Using inequalities in CHD mortality between practices to predict inequalities in CHD prevalence as Low and Low suggest may itself present analytical difficulties. Mortality reflects both incidence and case fatality, and the latter might also correlate with deprivation.

The QOF does give us a new window on quality of care. We are only just beginning to understand the view.

References

1 Low A, Low A. The QOF equity window: an illusion or a different view? J Public Health. 10.1093/pubmed/fdl014.


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Standards in school toilets: do extra resources make a difference?

Sirs,

In 1999, we reported in this journal a survey of school children in South Wales that highlighted the inadequacies of their school toilet facilities and their reluctance to use them.1 As a result of this work, and the response generated, our local education authority invested £800 000 up until 2005 to improve and update school toilet facilities.

Inadequate provision and maintenance of school toilets is not a new concern and has been linked to infectious disease outbreaks involving school children.2 The recent Escherichia coli O157 outbreak in South Wales reminds us of the importance of children having access to well-maintained and hygienic school toilet facilities, where they are able to wash their hands after toilet use, for preventing/controlling such an outbreak. Statutory regulations for school toilets in their present form specify only the number of toilet cubicles that should be available per pupil,3 yet, on the same school premises, the regulations for toilet provision for adult staff use are more detailed, with a requirement for hand-washing facilities and a minimum hygiene standard.4 We set out to investigate whether the extra financial investment locally had resulted in an improvement in school toilet standards since our original survey in 1999, by repeating our questionnaire survey of local school-aged children.1

Of the 92 who completed the questionnaires, 55% were male respondents with an age range of 4–15 years, and a mean age of 6.2 years, and in all 65 schools were represented. Those questioned were similar in age and sex characteristics to the group surveyed previously,1 and the responses are summarized in Table 1.

Our survey has highlighted that at best there has been a marginal improvement only. We remain concerned that 11% of children still do not always have hand-washing/drying...
facilities available after toilet use and that 21% report that they do not always have toilet paper available. Over half of the respondents continue to perceive that their school toilets are not always clean. These inadequacies could be important in relation to the control and spread of infectious diseases. We feel that the availability of additional resources alone, on a voluntary basis, may not be the best way forward in improving school toilet standards. We propose that schools should be under a legal obligation to provide adequate, clean and well-maintained toilet facilities for children’s use—as they are for adult members of staff. Perhaps it is time for our legislators to revisit the ‘School Premises Regulations’? 

References

Yours faithfully
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Table 1 Comparison of responses obtained (percentage replying) to each of the survey questions in the current and previous studies of 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>2005 (%)</th>
<th>1999 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any current or recent problems with constipation?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will you use the school toilets for a ‘poo’?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only if desperate</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will you use the school toilets for a ‘wee’?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only if desperate</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can toilet cubicles be closed and locked?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there hand-washing/drying facilities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there toilet paper available?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the toilets clean?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do they smell nice?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you allowed to go to the toilet during lessons?</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you ever bullied in the school toilets?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
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