

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Statistics of Therapeutic Trials

SIR,—I regret to have to draw your attention to certain misrepresentations and distortions of facts in Dr. M. Weatherall's review of my book *Statistics of Therapeutic Trials* in the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology*, 1956, **8**, 223. After having carefully considered the matter, I must ask you to publish this letter in your Journal as correction of the above-mentioned misrepresentations.

The reviewer makes the following statements:

"Most of the chapters deal with trials in specific diseases. . . ."

"This sort of difficulty seems to arise from trying to avoid general treatment of the logic and mathematics of therapeutic trials. . . ."

". . . general principles are discarded in favour of a series of examples. . . ."

I submit that these statements are untrue, and that it is very difficult to understand how a responsible reviewer could arrive at such views. A glance at the Table of Contents must have shown him that he was in error.

As regards the first of these statements: contrary to what the reviewer says, 16 chapters comprising over 200 pages deal with the general principles of significance testing and with the logic and methodology of therapeutic trials, as against 13 chapters comprising 150 pages which deal with specific diseases. As the reviewer's second and third statements show, he has turned a completely blind eye to the content and import of 200 pages out of 350, and all his arguments are affected by that inexplicable omission.

As regards the second statement: what I say in the Preface about an alternative approach to medical statistics, viz. to start with the medical situation and try to allocate to certain typical situations the appropriate statistical methods, does not mean that general treatment has been avoided. On the contrary. Had the reviewer only read as far as p. 8 he would have seen that the medical concepts of "outcome," "duration" and "course" of disease are introduced in such a way as to enable the general principles of qualitative, quantitative and bi-variate statistics to be developed in their legitimate order and in such detail as required for their sensible application in medical statistics.

The third of the reviewer's statements is the premiss for certain obvious conclusions. Since the premiss is not true, it would seem futile to go into greater detail about the conclusions. Only in so far as the reviewer complains here about being quite bewildered, it must be pointed out that somebody who misses over 200 pages of general theory *would* find the application confusing. Otherwise he would not, since it is one of the characteristic features of my book that it is just the painstaking development of the methodology of therapeutic trials in the general part which has enabled me to define clearly the position, with regard to these principles, of any of the multifarious statistical methods encountered in the special part, and in medical literature in general.

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