

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

THIS is in regard to the paper by IBRAHIM [1] and his colleagues which appears in this issue of the Journal. Since polemics do not advance science, and since squabbles over assumptions and mis-perceptions even of such basic things as the difference between a population and a cohort are irrelevant to the fundamental issues, we would like to emphasize the areas in which IBRAHIM and his colleagues appear to agree with us:

1. We agree that some knowledge about sequential relationships is necessary before causal inferences are drawn.

2. We agree that cross-sectional and retrospective studies are useful.

3. We agree that the building of models stimulates thought.

4. We agree that in developing a theory it is important to use all the sound data available.

5. We agree on the importance of the limited inference.

Speaking of the limited inference, we are reminded of an apocryphal story about Dr. OLIVER WENDEL HOLMES. It appears that Dr. HOLMES was on this particular evening summoned from a medical meeting to attend a patient. As he came out of the amphitheater, the hat check boy handed him his hat without waiting for the check. Dr. Holmes then asked him,

"How did you know this to be my hat?"

The boy replied, "I didn't know it was your hat, Sir."

"Then why did you give it to me?" asked the doctor.

"Because you gave it to me, Sir," replied the boy.

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REFERENCE

1. IBRAHIM, M. A., SACKETT, D. L. KANTOR, S. and WINKELSTEIN, W.: Psychological patterns and coronary heart disease: an appraisal of the determination of etiology by means of a stochastic process. *J. chron. Dis.*, 20, 931 (1968).