

correspondence

Earth scientists

SIR,—Sir Peter Kent, Sir Kingsley Dunham and Professor Percival Allen charge (*Nature*, June 14) that my article of April 26 was “erroneous and misleading” and “appeared in *Nature* without an attempt to check the facts”. They are quite wrong; indeed in their letter they commit the very sins of which they choose to accuse me, not the least of which is to put into quotation marks an inaccurate version of a phrase I actually wrote.

In my original article I claimed that the General Secretary of the European Geophysical Society (EGS) discovered the planning of the Reading meeting of European geological societies “more or less accidentally”—a claim that Sir Peter and his colleagues attempt to refute by pointing out that the EGS General Secretary was specially informed of the meeting by its organisers. Indeed he was; but the fact is that the meeting had first come to his attention (more or less accidentally, as I said) more than two months before the ‘official’ information was received. Sir Peter and his cosignatories also point out that the EGS President was sent a “special letter” inviting EGS members to participate in the Reading meeting and soliciting topics for discussion. A letter was indeed sent, although in view of the fact that it bears a remarkable resemblance to other letters sent elsewhere, its “special” nature may be doubted.

The most significant aspect of the letter to the EGS President, however, is that the contents of the letter are precisely as Sir Peter and his colleagues describe them—which suggests that the basic point of my article has been missed. No one has suggested that EGS members have not been invited to, or would not be welcome at, the Reading meeting. But what is being suggested is that the organisers of the Reading committee have gone ahead with the first stage of what may well develop into a Geological Society of Europe (GSE) without first consulting the governing bodies of the European earth science societies already in existence, most notably the Council of the EGS.

Sir Peter and his colleagues presumably felt that such consultation was unnecessary. Others, including myself, disagree. For reasons which are too complex to go into here, in both Britain and the United States (and possibly in other countries too) geologists and

geophysicists have come to be associated with different organisations. It is perhaps now too late to change that situation; but in my view it would be a tragedy if a similar sort of separation were to be perpetuated on a European-wide basis. This does not necessarily imply the need for an all-embracing European Earth Science Society, for, as I pointed out in my original article, the problems involved in running such a Society would be almost insurmountable. But what it does mean is the need for close coordination. Geologists may deplore it, but in view of the fact that the EGS already exists the onus must be on anyone thinking, however remotely, about a GSE, to take special care to avoid harmful separation. In return, I feel sure that existing organisations will see the need to modify their own programmes accordingly. In any event, true coordination is much more than simply sending letters announcing a conference.

Sincerely yours,

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Kidney transplants

SIR,—The article “Transplantation: the failing machinery”, (*Nature*, April 19, 1974) I thought, represented the kidney donor problem in this country very accurately and unfortunately its comments were confirmed by Dr Dudley’s letter (May 31). He was quite right that in the north-west area of London there are no neurosurgical centres, but for years the Atkinson Morley Hospital in the south-west has been the source of many kidneys going to St Mary’s. It should be pointed out that head injuries form only a small proportion of the potential donors. In the south-east only 20% of all kidneys come from patients dying from trauma and less than 5% from a recognised neurosurgical unit. The majority of our donors come from general hospitals and they are by no means always on a ventilator. Indeed, in September, 1973 there was a suitable donor at St Mary’s Hospital, Harrow Road, which was turned down by their Transplant Unit. This year there was a similar case at St Charles Hospital, W10. These kidneys were in fact taken by clinicians from the London Transplant Group and used in the national pool. It cannot be argued that kidneys from these donors were unsuitable for trans-

plantation. In fact I have sent similar kidneys to St Mary’s Hospital and the national pool with good results. Eighty per cent of all kidneys taken in south-east London are from similar donors (60% are not on a ventilator) and 50% function immediately.

As far as potential donors suffering from primary cerebral tumours are concerned, and the fact that they go elsewhere for terminal care, is no reason why those kidneys should be lost to the transplant pool. In Newcastle, all similar patients are put on a donor register and whichever hospital is concerned with their terminal events notifies the transplant team before death.

From my own experience of working in the Casualty Department at St Mary’s, Harrow Road, and from conversations with nurses, housemen and students, it is fairly obvious that there is suitable donor material not being collected in at least one of the hospitals in the north-west area of London. I think that this represents “unequivocal evidence” that there is a lack of understanding and cooperation between doctors which is responsible for the lack of kidneys available for transplantation today.

Yours faithfully,

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SIR,—May I make a few comments on Mr H. A. F. Dudley’s criticisms (May 31) of my article on kidney transplants (April 19)?

The figures for the numbers of kidneys received from and contributed to the central pool came from the DHSS Organ Matching Service at Bristol. And having spoken to a number of doctors and surgeons, I was convinced that there was, in some cases, more take than give—and not necessarily because of any variation in the number of cranial trauma patients.

The lack of cooperation between doctors was one of the reasons given by the Royal College of Physicians for the lack of kidneys. I also spoke to a considerable number of hospitals and doctors and found in many cases complete ignorance about the transplant programme and about transplant procedures regarding donor kidneys. And if Mr Dudley wants “unequivocal evidence” surely Mr Barnes’ story is it.

Yours faithfully,

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