

makes the appointment—may have felt towards a man who has recently crossed swords with the magazine *Private Eye*, Dr Doll emphasized last week that throughout his career he has maintained an active interest in clinical medicine and teaching. For the past twenty years, he has done clinical research at the outpatient department of the Central Middlesex Hospital, where he is an honorary associate physician. And as a result of his work on gastroenterology, he has also been elected a member of the British Society of Gastroenterology and an honorary member of the American Gastroenterology Association. Dr Doll lectures at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and



at University College Hospital on epidemiology. He emphasized that there is also at Oxford a chair in clinical medicine, so the Regius professor need not be, and often in the past has not been, a clinician.

Dr Doll intends to continue his research in epidemiology, and says that he will have good facilities and at least as much time for research as at present. The teaching and administrative load at Oxford will occupy no more time than the work involved in planning the Clinical Research Centre. The Department of Medicine has only six established posts and there are no vacancies, but the Nuffield Committee has apparently given a substantial sum so that he can take a nucleus of a research team with him. He hopes to take at least two of his current staff at the Statistical Research Unit. It remains to be seen what will now happen in the Statistical Research Unit of the MRC, which was intended to become the division of epidemiology at the Clinical Research Centre.

#### MEDICAL RESEARCH

### Computer for Medicine

At midday last Tuesday the Medical Research Council's new computer centre in London was officially opened by Mr Edward Short, the Secretary of State for Education and Science. With the addition of this £280,000 GEC 90/300 computer, the MRC now owns about six computers and also has access to several others. The

new unit is the biggest yet and is intended to be a central facility for MRC staff in London.

The new computer is an American machine manufactured in Britain under licence by GEC-AEI Automation Ltd. It has a general speed of operation and access time of 2–5 microseconds and 32,000 words of fast core store. The computer, which is being programmed in Fortran, also has a fast line punch, a fast card reader and five magnetic tape decks. This machine was particularly chosen for the fine range of software which is incorporated and which includes a large disk store of 500,000 words—particularly useful for problems involving large quantities of information.

The computer was installed last autumn (19 months late) and has been working for the past two months. The unit, however, has for a year been compiling a library of standard programs which can be applied to many of the service tasks. There will be analyses of both large and small-scale clinical and epidemiological studies and the computer will also be used for keeping records of MRC expenditure.

One team at the unit is at present exploring the application of computers in medicine and biology while another is using the computer to recognize microscopical preparations of chromosomes in the hope of finding an automated process which will be 100 times faster than human methods. Other research activities of the unit will be concerned with problems of mathematical modelling and medical data processing.

Dr Clive Spicer, the director of the unit, estimates that the running cost of the unit will be about £60,000 a year, excluding the depreciation of the computer. It is hoped, however, that this unit will be directly linked with another new computer which is to be installed at the Clinical Research Centre at Northwick Park, thus providing an even better service.

#### SOCIETIES

### Together at Last

AFTER a year and a half of scarcely perceptible activity, merger discussions between Britain's three largest chemical societies are now in full swing, and the presidents of the Chemical Society, the Royal Institute of Chemistry and the Society of Chemical Industry hope that they will have concrete proposals to put before their members within the next month or two.

Abortive attempts to streamline the organization of the chemical societies were made in 1941 and again in 1960, but this time, according to Sir Ronald Nyholm and Mr Leslie Williams, the presidents of the Chemical Society and the R.I.C., it should be possible to arrive at a workable solution—which is just as well since "what is now at stake is the future standing and prestige of chemistry in the community and a failure to take action on this occasion will have much more serious and lasting consequences". The latest move toward collaboration was made in 1967 when the societies agreed (*Nature*, 215, 1116; 1967) that Sir Eric Bingen, a former deputy chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd, should conduct an independent investigation into ways and means of rationalizing the activities of the three organizations. Nothing much seems to have happened until Sir James Taylor, an industrialist and former president of the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society, took over in 1968