Editorial

Indexing Occupational and Environmental Medicine

From 1994 there will be a change in the method of indexing the subjects of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Papers and proceedings will be indexed by a keyword system, and authors are asked to choose up to three keywords for each paper at the manuscript stage, which will then contribute to the compilation of the annual index. A keyword is a word (or phrase) that will identify the subject matter of a written paper or proceeding in an index. The index will be published, as usual, at the end of the December issue. The format will be different, with the title of the paper repeated after each keyword on every entry.

The author index will no longer include the title of the paper and will become a list of authors and page numbers only.

On the surface choosing index headings would not seem difficult but medicine, because of its synonyms, phrasal headings, proprietary and pharmaceutical names of drugs, syndromes, Latin words, and assorted lay terms, produces problems of its own.

An index should be consistent. It is not good if half the entries are under asbestos fibres and the other half under fibres, asbestos, and whereas it is reasonable to make some decisions about the entries that can be anticipated authors will not know what other work is being published, or under what titles, in the same volume. Some modifications may, therefore have to be made by the editor.

Authors are advised to scan papers for keywords that may not be in the title, to use British approved names rather than pharmaceutical names for drugs, and to avoid general terms such as clinical, complications, adverse effects, and patient. As the subject of the Journal is occupational and environmental medicine it is better not to use these words as headings, with few exceptions. In general, it is better not to split accepted concepts. For instance, use lead workers, rather than workers, lead.

Some shortened forms can be accepted; DNA, AIDS, HIV, and -cAMP are universally known and are the images that spring to mind before looking up, but mostly the full form should be used as the keyword. Mostly the Greek letter is not used in alphabetisation (for example, β₂-microglobulin will be indexed under M). There will be no cross references in the keyword index.

This cannot be more than an attempt to guide authors and perhaps to warn of the pitfalls, but it is important to remember that if authors wish to have their work found easily in the index they should consider the keywords carefully.