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Headquarters, Wellington  
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## Trends

### Only bits and foetuses

I ALWAYS SAID that I'd never marry an undertaker or a gynaecologist. The word must have got round, because none of them have ever asked. The thought of having a lover who organised grief and handled dead bodies all day turns me right off. So does the thought of a lover who handles other women's bits all day. This makes me different from most women, who long to marry doctors because they represent status. To me they represent paternalism. Paternalism also turns me right off.

I'm lucky because I've had a doctor for the last 15 years who talks to me as if I'm human, answers questions as if I'm intelligent, and sang when they painted my anal warts. Opera. A doctor like that is a treasure. They don't make them like that at medical school.

Having a regular doctor whom I like means the deficiencies of other doctors are all the more obvious to me. I hate seeing other doctors. When I see them I find out what other women put up with all the time. This horrifies me. My experience of most doctors teaches me that they need a swift kick in the bits.

You are never more vulnerable than when you're in a doctor's surgery. If you're a woman, it's not easy to cope with. You were taught from babyhood that you mustn't pull your pants down in the sandpit and play show and tell. This conditioning is supposed to evaporate immediately you get something wrong with your bits. You're supposed to flourish them without a blush, and relax as they're manipulated and explored. You can never quite accept that your doctor sees you only as your afflicted bit. He doesn't care about your interesting theory about *Steppenwolf*, that you can recite all of *Kubla Khan*, that you cook Latvian food like a genius. He is only dimly aware that you have a mind at all, to carry the concept of modesty around in.

The trouble with being a woman is that when you see the doctor, it's almost always about your bits. You develop fat files describing their afflictions and your contraceptive problems. Men can't relate to this. They can't imagine how you sigh as the fat file comes out again. If anyone writes my biography, based on my doctor's file, I'll kill them.

Male doctors, seeing those fat female files, seem to suppose that all women are malingerers. Since men don't have to see the doctor so often, female complaints must be largely illusory.

It took me years to recover from my first pregnancy test, many miles from my own doctor. I had it at one of those hospitals which specialise in female bits. They insisted on calling me Mrs although I wasn't married, they left me for an hour in a changing room with no window, or reading material, and then they wanted to ex-



amine me in a cubicle without the curtains drawn, even though it opened onto a busy hospital passage. It was too much for me by the time they got to me. I leapt off the bed and refused to be examined.

I was in tears by the time they gave me the half-gallon plastic jar to pee in all the following day. They didn't explain to me how I'd do that in a busy office. I guess they didn't know that pregnant women most often work.

Fortunately, I wasn't pregnant. If I had been, I would never have gone near that place again. A lot of coloured women use that hospital. I pity them profoundly.

Maternity services are supposed to exist to serve women, but there's an increasing tendency for them to serve the medical profession, who are mostly men, instead. Hospital boards would rather have big, flash teaching hospitals than small maternity units where women feel comfortable. Women are supposed to understand that doctors have to be trained, and on them. They are seldom told that they don't *have* to have student doctors around while they're having babies. There's a lot of pressure on them not to make a fuss and insist. Women don't want to be called difficult patients. They'll be discounted even more.

Women are supposed to be glad to be in big, flash maternity units, for the sake of their babies. It's only one step from doctors seeing only their bits to seeing only their foetuses, after all.

Not surprisingly, a lot of women are nowadays exploring fringe medicines, and any alternative to the prevailing medical system. I expect the medical system discounts even this trend because so many women are involved, and women are mainly bits, not people. The comforting thing about it is that the death rate doesn't seem to have risen in the last few years as a result. If this keeps up, people are likely to start seeing their doctors as human beings with human frailties, and to question the authority they assume over life, sickness and death. I dread this. I expect we'll all die in droves.

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