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# EDITORIAL

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## Anarchy: the New Order?

A whole range of prescribing behaviours are accepted as *normal*, or should it be, *usual*. The average cost per script for GPs is approximately R55. The question arises; when is a particular doctor's average cost per script too high?

I am told that certain colleagues, usually dispensing, have an average script cost of ten times the national figure. Though they are few in number, they have become a large enough factor to join forces with patients, pharmacists and hospitals to bankrupt the medical aid schemes. This in itself might be a blessing but that's not what I want to write about now, as we enter 1993.

Hearing more and more about fringe behaviour in the health field, made me wonder about its origins. You know, stories like patients buying cameras with scripts for expensive medicines – who knows with whose help! Hospitals casually making 'mistakes' with accounts; and being paid with unnecessary haste by medical aid schemes.

I suddenly wondered how much of this escalation of cost-raising behaviour is linked to the general anarchy in the country as we move from the old to a new order? 'Let's make a quick buck while things are out of control.' A manager of a private hospital told me some years back, "we have overcapitalized in the private hospital sector and to get the returns we need, the funding system is going to collapse".

Cynical and anarchial behaviour has penetrated many areas of society. Politicians keep posturing, creating conflict while they compete to increase their power base. Crime figures rise annually. Police say the

only way forward for them is to be accountable to local communities and so become an integral part of the community. The community has to take control of itself before a new order can be established out of the present anarchy.

The medical community seems to have the same option before it. We need to discipline the members of our own community for two very good reasons. Uncaring and exploitative behaviour must be dealt with by ourselves, otherwise others will do it for us! Those that pay and the legislators will increasingly regulate us. The second reason is that if enough of us go beyond the accepted norms of practice, people will lose all trust in us as a profession. It will be real anarchy if trust is lost as we pass from the *old "order"* to a *new "order"*. Peer- and self-discipline that clearly benefit our patients and the public can save us from this sad fate.

*Sam Johnson*