

## Physicians and the war on drugs

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### Dr. Mabry's rebuttal

One thing I will say about Dr. Roe, he may be wrong, but he is never in doubt. Dr. Roe's response to my counterpoint article is, as expected, replete with the same misinformation contained in his original article. Rather than respond to Dr. Roe point by point, I will simply let the readers decide for themselves what he and I actually said and meant in our articles and encourage them to check out our references. But, most importantly, let's not take our eye off the ball.

Regardless of his appreciable zeal, Dr. Roe ignores the science of genetics and physiology. The primary problem with his vision of America—dishing up a buffet line brimming with hard drugs and allowing all to partake—is that some in the crowd will have been born with a genetic tendency to become addicted. While those individuals amount to only about 10 to 15 percent of the population, they are likely to become 100 percent addicted if exposed.

Moreover, those individuals that do become addicted often lose interest in all they hold dear, and will pursue drugs at all cost, with predictably bad results. Dr. Roe believes that because the majority of the population can occasionally use addictive drugs, it's a wonder what all the fuss is about. I, conversely, argue that society should protect the minority from easy exposure to potentially lethal drugs and expand treatment for those who have succumbed. Those who professionally treat addicted patients know firsthand what is and is not important in the battle against drug abuse and addiction. Interestingly, I cannot find one drug-

rehabilitation professional who calls for increased supplies of purer and cheaper illicit drugs for our nation. Surely, they all can't be wrong.

Next, I want to re-emphasize to the readers my argument for improved education of health care professionals about the topics of drug abuse, addiction, and treatment. I want to further encourage all physicians to become involved with how society deals with these very real problems (including efforts to get needed therapy to those in trouble), to look at alternative sentencing for drug related offenses, and to increase public awareness of the overall problem of addiction.

Like Dr. Roe, I too would refer the readers to *The Economist*, but in this instance to the March 27, 1997, issue, which contains an excellent article about the newer model of justice delivered by "drug courts." This is a process in which the legal system helps with treatment for first or second offenders by backing up treatment recommendations with mandatory drug testing and the threat of jail for noncompliance. The Urban Institute has recently shown this approach to decrease the relapse rate threefold compared to the traditional court system sentences.

Finally, I would like to thank the editorial staff, the *Bulletin* advisors, and the College leadership for allowing us to discuss this controversial but important topic and for the opportunity to bring this serious matter to the attention of the Fellows. 