The concentration of the red cell folate in patients with pernicious anaemia is frequently reduced in B12 deficiency (Hoffbrand et al, 1966). It should be made clear how many of the patients with a reduced red cell folate concentration were in fact B12 deficient. Certainly their statement that 'A low red cell folate is considered unequivocal evidence of folate deficiency' cannot be supported. Significant B12 and folate deficiency is a rare finding in patients with normal MCV unless there is accompanying iron deficiency, chronic inflammatory disease, or malignancy. No mention of these factors is made by Raper and Choudhury in their patients with normal MCVs and a low red cell folate or B12 concentration, and hence any significance of their findings is masked.

The fact that 18 out of 40 patients with normal red cell folate concentrations and raised MCVs 'developed folic acid deficiency during the following six months' is not surprising, and an appraisal of blood film morphology and serum folate results together with bone marrow examination would have been appropriate. Perhaps more surprising was the finding of a normal B12 concentration in a patient with pernicious anaemia. There would certainly appear to be little justification for repeated red cell folate assays in these patients as seems to be suggested by the authors.

There is still no substitute for a careful evaluation of the clinical and haematological findings in an individual case before requesting B12 or folate assays.

The author comments as follows:

This laboratory is a regular contributor to the DHSS and BCSH Haematology Quality Assessment Trial and during the period of our study we submitted results on 40 blood samples supplied by the DHSS. On 38 out of the 40 samples our MCV result was within 1.8 standard deviations of the overall national mean obtained from the results submitted by all the laboratories. This means that our MCV is usually no more than 2 fl different from the national average.

Five of the 156 patients with a red cell folate of <170 ng/ml had a subnormal serum B12 level. We agree that significant B12 and folate deficiency is a rare finding in patients with a normal MCV unless...