that direct method may be negative.

The purpose of this letter is to point out that, although buffy coat smears may not be reliable as a general test for bacteraemia, they may often give a vital and usually almost instant clue in the emergency diagnosis and management of meningococcal septicaemia. Possibly gonococcal septicaemia may be similarly detectable. Smears from either capillary tubes or Wintrobe tubes are suitable, and I hope it is not too obvious or insulting to point out that hot breath and handkerchiefs should be avoided in the cleaning of slides to be used in searching for micro-organisms.

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References

UK National microbiological quality assessment scheme

May I comment briefly on one aspect of the report by JJS Snell et al in your issue of January 1982.1

The truism that special attention will be given to quality control specimens is self-evident but is not entirely for the reasons advanced by the authors that laboratories will wish to appear to be efficient. For example, experience of the scheme shows that a Microbiology Quality Control Laboratory (MQCL) specimen with a history of "whooping cough" has a statistically more significant chance of yielding a growth of Bordetella pertussis than does a routine specimen from a patient with a similar history. A recent example of such a specimen required plating on three separate occasions before Bordetella pertussis was isolated. Clearly a routine specimen is not likely to be treated in a similar manner. In general, participants in the scheme have come to accept that "positive" results from MQCL specimens are more likely than negative results. Perhaps there should be a higher percentage of true negative specimens issued to correct this bias.

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Correction

Diagnosis of Legionella pneumonia infections by means of formalised yolk sac antigens

The correct NCTC numbers for L. pneumophila strains used for preparing formalised yolk sac antigens described in the above paper (February 1982)1 are as follows:

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<th>Serogroup</th>
<th>Strain</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pontiac—1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Togus—1</td>
<td>11230</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Bloomington—2</td>
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Reference