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## Letters

### What makes a good doctor?

To the reader who wrote that "white men are in fact, on average, inherently smarter" than nonwhites or women (SN: 12/24&31/94, p.49), I would recommend caution and a closer look before drawing any conclusions.

Asian students, for example, tend to read test items and instructions more literally than non-Asians. Consequently, many bright Asian high school students (especially those for whom English is a second language at home) have scored lower than expected on the SAT and other tests because it took them longer to dissect meanings.

One would have to overlook many such real-world factors in order to hold that results on the national medical exam reveal any innate racial or gender superiority.

Allen Wai Jang  
San Gabriel, Calif.

Race and sex aren't important in a medical

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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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professional; ability and attitude are. They are equally important, and neither can replace the other.

I don't mind if my doctor is smarter than I am, but I do mind if that doctor is a snob about it. I want to entrust my life only to a doctor who looks at me and sees a life as precious as his or her own.

Rebecca Ripley  
Menlo Park, Calif.

### New role for counseling

It became evident as I formulated my opinions on the four cases in "DNA Dilemmas" (SN: 12/17/94, p.408) that there is both an ethical and a counseling (therapeutic) dimension to most such cases. Once the society clarifies what ought to be (the ethical imperative), then skillful counselors should be there to assist people in working through their problems.

The nature of this counseling will be somewhat different from traditional psy-

chotherapy with emotionally troubled persons but every bit as demanding of sensitive counseling skills.

The 30-year-old woman with a genetic predisposition to colon cancer is an excellent case in point. Her refusal to share the information with her at-risk relatives is a clear instance of failure to accept an ethical obligation. But given plenty of opportunity to explore her feelings in an accepting relationship with a skilled counselor, she may well accept the obligation and inform her relatives.

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