The Building Research Board of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research have announced the arrangement of a programme of research into hospital building to be undertaken with the Ministry of Health, the Department of Health for Scotland and the Division of Architectural Studies of the Nuffield Foundation. This is a timely step, now that it is expected that the Government will spend some £300 million on building new hospitals in the next six or seven years. Not only is it important that this sum, which many will consider to be inadequate in any case, should be spent as usefully as possible; the Board’s observation that the running cost of a new hospital may amount annually to as much as one-third of the initial capital cost emphasizes the need to build hospitals that can be run, as well as built, economically. Many of the older buildings still in use are not only unhygienic and unattractive, but are extremely costly to run as well, which is another reason for replacing them as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, however attractive and efficient a hospital building may be, it is the kindness and understanding shown towards him that will matter to the individual patient. The need for human sympathy is stressed by Mr. Frank Hart, House Governor of Charing Cross Hospital, in an article in The Observer. Mr. Hart makes a number of simple but excellent suggestions for helping patients feel at home, pointing out that ward routine should be based on what is most restful for the patient and not on the convenience of the staff.

Most patients probably judge a hospital more by the standard of the nursing than by any other single factor. If the nursing staff are kind, thoughtful and efficient, a number of other failings may be overlooked. It is this that may lead patients sometimes to prefer old uncomfortable hospitals to bright new ones, just as many will put up with a crowded waiting room in a trusted general practitioner’s private house rather than attend a modern clinic. At a time when so much thought is being given to modern hospital building, Mr. Hart reminds us that it is human relationships that matter most in the end.

REFERENCES
2. HART, FRANK (1960), 'Humanity in Hospitals', The Observer, August 14.