is at liberty to pool the readings of all the (dogs).’

It is most important that unthinking use of computer programs is prevented, and that appropriate advice is taken on the analysis of data. Easy to use programs are not in themselves the answer, but there is current work being carried out by several statisticians to attempt to have a computer program which will elucidate the data structure of an experiment by asking questions of the researcher. Such a program may have its own dangers but may prevent some abuses.

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Correction equation for ECG time intervals: a reply

We thank the editor for letting us comment on the letter from Dr Evans regarding our previous correspondence (Kelman et al., 1984). We agree entirely with the points which he makes, especially his remarks on the dangers of ignoring the structure of data, and the unthinking use of widely available computer programs for statistical analysis. This was the major point of our criticism of Dr Staniforth’s analysis (Staniforth, 1983), and the part which Dr Staniforth failed to clarify. We are still puzzled by his conclusion that it is advantageous to use a curvilinear model when each individual data set did not deviate from a linear one. The justification in Dr Staniforth’s original reply (Staniforth, 1984) that this approach has been used by other workers, and that similar results were obtained, presumably indicates that if one repeats a particular experiment then, with luck, one obtains the same answer. This does not validate the experiment or, as in this case, the choice of analysis.

We apologise for returning to an old topic, but we feel that it is important that invalid conclusions and/or techniques are not added to the medical literature.

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