Clare Matheson’s inaccurate reporting

In her letter to the editor published in the 27 August 2010 issue of the NZMJ, *A patient’s response to recent criticisms of the findings in the report of the Cervical Cancer Inquiry 1988*, your correspondent Clare Matheson apparently quotes the pathohistologic report for the biopsy of her cervix performed “re 27-1-76”. Seemingly incontrovertibly, she states “Biopsy cervix=Carcinoma of cervix – Excision appears incomplete”.

If she had checked how that report was recorded in the Cartwright Report she could have seen that its accurate duplication there in Appendix 11, on p.282, was not as “Carcinoma of the cervix” but as “Carcinoma insitu of the cervix”. Curiously perhaps, C Matheson had already quoted the phrase correctly and fully, p.69, in her own 1989 book “Fate Cries Enough” (which she freely offers you as her reference #14). If ‘Any thinking person must wonder how many other errors there are’, then here is one requiring correction. She must know the significance of her serious omission for the doctors involved.

Echoes! One is reminded that it was with the word ‘cancer’—not the words ‘carcinoma in situ’—that Ms Sandra Coney and another of your correspondents of 27 August, Ms Phillida Bunkle, had referred [Metro June 1987, p.56] to “Ruth’s” 1979 discharge from National Women’s Hospital: “as the final histology clearly showed, she still had cancer”.

It can be observed however, that even Prof C Paul, when quoting that pair’s same assertion in the *Brit Med J* [27Aug1988; p.533], was obliged to refute such a claim by expanding the clause they used to “‘she still had cancer [carcinoma in situ].’”. Yet recently the *New Zealand Herald* persisted with this unfounded myth (“No accounting for mistakes”, issue of Saturday, 16 July 2010).

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