CORRESPONDENCE

He Loves Me Not

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Sir

In the article in your current issue on making so-called ‘orphan drugs’ available via the NHS,¹ it seems to be tacitly assumed that our overriding duty as physicians and surgeons is to prolong the existence of our patients whether or not that is their main preoccupation and what our overpopulated world needs. We do not of course ever ‘save’ lives when we prolong them unless we concern ourselves principally with their quality and what its prolongation contributes to their life seen as a whole. It is sometimes forgotten that if we double the expectation of life, we double the world’s population whatever the birth rate and that there comes a time when even in purely Malthusian terms our numbers inevitably impinge on what makes our lives worth living. I write as one whose advanced age leads me to ponder on such questions and well aware that in asking them I will offend many of my erstwhile colleagues whose life’s work has been saving lives as they see it.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

References