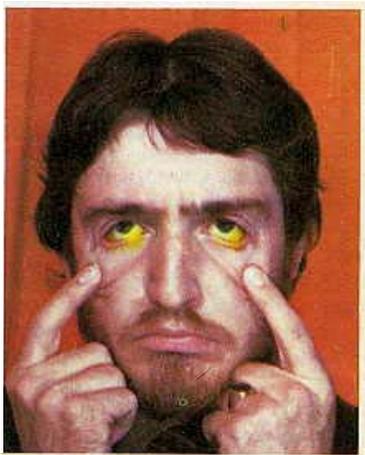


Join the Gilbert Trust

Photograph courtesy of the photo-booth, Chelmsford Railway Station



Jon Garvey is setting up a self-help group only for those who know what icteric means.

Another periodical, egged on by one of the pharmaceutical companies, recently provided me with a list of all the self-help groups they could think of. As I flicked through, ostensibly to provide myself with information to help my patients, I was in reality searching for one that I could join. For self-help organisations are a bit like committees. The more there are, the more they proliferate, until one can envisage a time when everybody is eligible for at least one, and they become the late twentieth century equivalent of the Mothers' Union or the Freemasons. If this sounds far-fetched, a local lady tried to get us involved in a caesarian section support group she was starting. Now my wife knows about sections, this mode of delivery being almost mandatory for doctors' wives, but two or three years later this does not seem all that relevant.

Be that as it may, it was with great disappointment that I found nothing in the list for me. There is only one thing for it, I thought, I will have to start my own group. So I hereby introduce, and invite applications for, mem-

bership of the Gilbert Trust. Like most sufferers from this under-diagnosed condition, I was found to have Gilbert's disease, or *maladie de Gilbert* as we members call it, at medical school.

"Ere," said my friend Jim, "you look a bit icteric!"

"What's 'icteric'?" I replied. When newly clued-up members of each successive intake continued to pass such comments, I realised this was no transient effect of poring over the books, and I went to the library to look up "icteric" and find possible causes. Most of these turned out to be rapidly fatal, so I hastily placed myself in the hands of a medical man, who tested my hepatic function, did a bromsulphthalein test, which nearly turned into a glucose tolerance test owing to the incompetence of a lab technician, and finally threatened me with a liver biopsy, which I declined, preferring to take my chances with whatever ailed my liver. Once the final diagnosis of Gilbert's had been made, I discovered that it affects 2 per cent of medical students and nurses, and nobody else. This is obviously because only they know what "icteric" means.

Signed photograph

But I mean to change all that. Membership of my trust is open to all (apart from Chinamen), who have been yellow for more than one year without dying. Upon receipt of his subscription, each member will be sent a signed photograph of the founder and a copy of his monograph on how to pronounce "Gilbert" properly, as well as "Crigler-Najjar", sufferers of whose syndrome are not, of course, eligible for membership, but from whom we will wish to distinguish ourselves with the proper authority. The trust will also aim to reduce the widespread prejudice in society against sufferers ("Sorry, Deirdre, I can't use you for the Optrex ad 'cause yer eyes are all

yeller"), to produce a monthly newsletter explaining this month's view on which enzyme is deficient, and to paint "Yellow is Beautiful" on railway bridges.

Come out of your cupboards, fellow victims. There are a million of you somewhere out there. Gilberts of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your cash. ■

Jon Garvey is a GP in Essex.