

whether or not to consider them 'familial'. Had Drs Keshavan & Toone chosen to do so, inspection of their data suggests they would have found an even more impressive difference in VBR between their familial and sporadic groups. However, it is important to keep in mind an underlying hypothesis before deciding whether one's glass is really half-full or half-empty. If the dependent variable is VBR, then the critical independent variable is not so much the absence of a family history as the presence of earlier environmentally-mediated brain insults which tend to congregate in the sporadic group.

One last point: perhaps because it jars with current nosological conceptions, schizophrenia with a family history of affective disorder is under-researched. The notion that it represents a distinct biological subgroup is well worth exploring further.

SHÔN LEWIS  
ADRIANNE REVELEY  
ROBIN M. MURRAY

*Institute of Psychiatry  
Denmark Hill  
London SE5 8AF*

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#### Deliberate Self-Harm and Out-patient Attendance

SIR: In their report concerning deliberate self-harm in Newcastle, O'Brien *et al* (*Journal*, February 1987, **150**, 246-247) demonstrated that the attendance rate of patients at out-patient appointments one week after the episode was 40%. A survey of deliberate self-harm (DSH) referrals carried out in the Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI) over a 16-week period in 1986 produced similar findings.

All cases of DSH at the BRI are referred for psychiatric assessment and disposal by a Senior House Officer (SHO) in psychiatry. During the course of our study, each of 88 patients was seen by one of four SHOs. Half of the patients were offered an out-patient appointment at the time they were seen. The reasons for not being offered an appointment were either that the patient was being followed up by another psychiatric team (13 patients), or the patient refused the appointment offered (14 patients), or finally that follow-up by the psychiatric services was not thought appropriate. In the latter case, either the patient was already involved with other agencies or the act of self-harm had produced a

positive change in circumstances (15 patients). Two patients were admitted to the psychiatric ward.

Of the group given an appointment for the next available psychiatric clinic place, to be seen by the assessing SHO, only 50% (22 patients) subsequently attended.

This study broadly confirms the findings of O'Brien *et al* and others (Morgan, 1976; Kreitman, 1979) showing a very high drop-out rate from psychiatric care of DSH patients. This phenomenon poses considerable difficulties for research in gathering both adequate numbers and representative samples of patients. As a corollary, it emphasises the need for improvement in the psychiatric management of DSH. We need to clarify whether high default rates imply an inherent limit to what can be offered to DSH patients or reflect deficiencies in treatment styles, some of which may be remediable.

C. W. LAWSON

*Barrow Hospital  
Barrow Gurney  
Bristol BS19 3SG*

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#### The BITE: Indices of Agreement

SIR: In reply to the letter from King & Williams (*Journal*, May 1987, **150**, 714), we would like to make the following points regarding the Bulimic Investigatory Test, Edinburgh (BITE) (Henderson & Freeman, 1987). Firstly, Drs King & Williams state that it is unclear whether the BITE is a screening test or a diagnostic instrument. The BITE was designed as a screening test for use in a wide variety of settings to allow the detection of sufferers and potential sufferers of bulimia nervosa. Examination of the thirty items that comprise the symptom sub-scale will show that they provide information on a wide range of types of behaviour associated with binge-eating. By looking at an individual's responses to each item, the user will be able to extract the information they require to answer questions concerning diagnosis. We felt that it was pointless to attempt to produce a diagnostic instrument in an area where there is no agreement as to what constitutes a diagnosis of bulimia. Even the most recent DSM-III-R diagnostic category for bulimia is open to discussion.

The BITE covers all the current criteria for a DSM-III diagnosis of bulimia, as well as those proposed by Russell (1979). It is assumed that any