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Consultant psychiatrists' letters to general practitioners

Sir: Wright (1997) reports that general practitioners prefer letters that are one page in length.

As far as discharge letters are concerned, I think one side of A4 should be adopted as a standard because: (a) it saves paper; (b) GPs do not read long letters, for various reasons; (c) a single sheet is easier to file and retrieve; and, most importantly, (d) to be able to write a concise and comprehensive, yet non-repetitious letter, should be regarded as a marker of professional competence by trusts and doctors alike. And remember, all information on a discharged patient will be (or should have been) collected into the discharge summary statement, which will have gone out before; so the discharge letter should consist essentially of a short piece of prose beginning, for example: “Expanding on the discharge statement dated 2 February 1997 which your received”.

What then are we to make of the guidelines of the Institute of Psychiatry to which Wright refers and which appear to predicate considerably longer letters?

Wright, A. F. (1997) What a general practitioner can expect from a consultant psychiatrist. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, **3**, 25–32.

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