

Reports from the Divisions

North East Division Trainees Day

The 1985 North East Division Trainees Day took place at St James's Hospital, Leeds on 10 January 1985; the theme for the day was 'Being a Trainee in Psychiatry in the 1980s'. Over 60 trainees from both teaching and peripheral hospitals throughout the region attended.

The morning session was chaired by Dr Simon Baugh (Psychiatric Tutor, Lynfield Mount Hospital). The first speaker, Dr Peter Maguire (Senior Lecturer, Manchester University), gave an interesting and informative talk on the methods that he and his colleagues have developed over the past ten years to teach interviewing skills, and more recently psychotherapeutic skills. Initially Dr Maguire explained that he and his colleagues had concentrated on teaching these skills to medical students, and had only recently, rather belatedly perhaps, extended this to involve trainees in psychiatry, whom they discovered displayed many of the faults in interviewing techniques they had seen in medical students. These faults included lack of interview structure, inability to elicit personal details from the patient or to pick up important 'cues' from the patient, and an unwillingness to seek clarification from the patient of ambiguous statements. Using video or audiotape feedback of interviews conducted by the trainee, together with weekly supervision, they produced dramatic improvements in interviewing skills, which remained significantly better than skills developed with more traditional methods at five-year follow-up. More recently they had extended these methods to develop a basis for psychotherapy training for trainees, and this was demonstrated to the audience using a videotaped interview. The following discussion suggested that trainees were interested in this approach, and were aware of the deficits in their own training in this field. Dr Maguire suggested that these techniques could perhaps be most appropriately taught at a local level by interested psychiatric tutors.

For the second half of the morning session Professor Andrew Sims (University of Leeds) gave a talk on the problems that trainees encounter in attempting to get research projects started. He described a systematic, practical, down-to-earth approach which provided a useful model of how trainees could tackle the problems involved. He discussed how research ideas are germinated, where to get advice and information, and how to formulate ideas into a hypothesis that can be tested. This was followed by a description of how to design a research protocol, to progress from there to actually collecting the data, and finally to writing up and publishing results. This seemed to be a much more digestible account than many trainees had previously experienced, and removed much of the 'mythical' status of research.

After lunch the Chairman for the afternoon session, Professor Richard Mindham (University of Leeds),

introduced the first speaker, Dr Chris Whyte (Consultant Psychotherapist, Leicester). Dr Whyte gave an extremely thoughtful account, looking at the types of psychological reactions we all have to our patients. He divided these up into three types—role, diagnostic, and personal responses—and illustrated them from some work that he had done several years earlier with nursing staff at St James's Hospital. The role response was that characterising the 'caring role', while the diagnostic response was the well-known emotional response characteristic of particular illness-types, which could be diagnostic and was therefore important but underrated. Finally, the personal response characterised particular therapists and had to do with the particular strengths and weaknesses of individual personalities. Dr Whyte stressed the legitimacy of recognising and using emotional reactions in making clinical decisions. Thus there was a need to encourage the more open expression of personal reactions and feelings in clinical discussions about patients and their management. Only by being constantly aware of his own feelings and reactions could the therapist maintain himself as an effective 'therapeutic instrument'.

The final talk of the day was given by Professor Kenneth Rawsley (University of Wales College of Medicine), in which he introduced his subject by placing the role of the consultant in psychiatry in an historical perspective. He then reviewed the various factors evident today which are likely to have an important bearing on the future of the consultant in psychiatry, and thus inevitably on the role of the trainee. The Short Report's proposals would fundamentally change the role of many consultants, and would seemingly inevitably result in many peripheral hospitals running without any training grades. Many consultants were now beginning to work outside the traditional hospital setting, liaising with general practitioners and becoming more involved in the 'community'. The need for a 'medical audit' would necessitate consultants learning more management skills, while the proliferation of consultant posts with special interest or special responsibility for a particular patient group, would mean that senior registrars would require further specialist training. The discussion following this focused on the problems of training clinical assistants and other sub-consultant grade posts that may well provide the manpower in many peripheral hospitals in the future. The particular problems of overseas doctors and the possibility of sponsorship schemes were discussed, as was the possible future availability of part-time career posts.

Feedback

A questionnaire was given to all those trainees attending the meeting and generally opinions were favourable, although several commented that there had not been sufficient time to discuss all the issues brought up.

The questionnaire also included questions about training experiences in the different parts of the Division, and has provided us with some useful information. We are particularly grateful to all of the speakers who travelled considerable distances, and together made the day a success.

GILL TAGG
CHRIS TAYLOR

North East Division

North West Division Trainees Day

The annual Trainees Day in the North West Division was held on 6 March 1985, at Winwick Hospital, Warrington, Cheshire. The meeting was attended by more than 60 trainees and psychiatric tutors from the Division.

The meeting was opened by Dr A. A. Campbell (Chairman, North West Division) who outlined the forthcoming programme of the Division and encouraged trainees to participate. He spoke about the importance of obtaining management training and mentioned some of the courses available. This was followed by a report from Dr N. Simpson (Honorary Secretary, Collegiate Trainees' Committee) on the activities of the trainees' committee during the past year.

Professor A. C. P. Sims (Chairman, Research Committee) gave a stimulating and entertaining guide for the novice setting out in research. We were led gently through the various stages from the initial motivation, through the process of generating research ideas to the perils and pitfalls likely to be encountered in practice. He advised trainees to research their own ideas rather than asking someone for a project, and outlined the ways in which the College tries to stimulate and encourage research.

The morning concluded with a thought-provoking account by Dr J. Jones (Senior Registrar, Liverpool) of 'Computers and the psychiatrist'. After a brief introduction to the technical aspects, he summarised current applications of computers such as record keeping, case registers, and the administration of rating scales for research. He went on to give an imaginative description of their future potential, including the development of 'expert systems' capable of diagnostic decision-making. This led to discussion about the desirability of machines as clinicians.

In the afternoon two discussion groups were formed—one on the difficulties encountered by trainees doing research, and the other the traditional exam workshop, which was organised by Drs C. McWilliam (Liverpool University) and G. McGrath (Manchester University).

The discussion on research was attended by 14 trainees, from both teaching and peripheral hospitals in all parts of the Division. Almost everybody reported doing some sort of research at present, and the group may not have been representative of trainees in general. While most people said they were partly motivated by the personal satisfaction derived from research, the consensus view was that trainees feel obliged to undertake research in order to

enhance their career prospects. The value to the trainee of research carried out as a chore for this reason was questioned, and at least some trainees thought that research is over-emphasised in postgraduate training programmes. It was suggested that for trainees seeking non-academic consultant posts there may be more appropriate ways of 'embellishing' a curriculum vitae, for example, experience overseas or a period of training spent acquiring a special skill.

Discussion concentrated on the practical difficulties experienced by many trainees, especially in the peripheral hospital. The majority of trainees attend courses and receive some teaching on research methodology. Nevertheless it was clear that there is an unmet demand for teaching, and especially for supervision and a suitable forum for discussing difficulties as they are encountered. Not all trainees have access to an experienced potential supervisor, and facilities and courses available at regional teaching centres are sometimes poorly advertised. It was suggested that there may be a role for the University Departments to make a regular commitment to the academic and research programmes of peripheral hospitals within their regions.

There was a discussion of the relative merits of individual research projects and participation in collaborative studies. There was general agreement that individual studies were more useful from the point of view of career prospects and provided more personal satisfaction, a point made by Professor Sims earlier in the day. On the other hand, it may be that the (training) needs of many trainees may be better met by carrying out a limited part of a larger collaborative project.

The final part of the day was devoted to an Open Forum entitled 'What future for trainees in peripheral hospitals?' Keynote addresses were given by Dr F. Creed (Senior Lecturer, Manchester) and Dr S. Pidd (Psychiatric Tutor, Lancaster Moor Hospital).

Dr Creed presented evidence that the proportion of trainees from peripheral hospitals in the North Western Region who obtain senior registrar appointments is small, and he saw little prospect for improvement in the immediate future. He discussed the conflict between the needs of trainees for a balanced training and a reasonable expectation of a career post, and the needs of the service which continues to rely on trainees to meet the clinical demands. Future moves to expand the consultant grade and restrict training grades will require changes in the pattern of postgraduate training in psychiatry. He suggested two alternative solutions. The first would be to concentrate all trainees in teaching hospital rotations while consultants in the periphery would work alone or supported by associate specialists. The alternative adopted by other specialties would be to create large rotations based on teaching hospitals but including posts in other parts of the region. Apart from geographical difficulties, this would distort the balance between general psychiatry and the specialties required by College guidelines on training.