

Sketch from the recent history of psychiatry

The history of the Maudsley Hospital Junior Common Room: The Complaints Book (28 January 1959–26 July 1964)

Selections by GREG WILKINSON, Director, Academic Sub-Department of Psychological Medicine in North Wales (University of Wales College of Medicine)

The Maudsley Hospital Junior Common Room (JCR) Complaints Book was opened on 28 January 1959 by the secretary of the JCR, Dr R. H. Cawley (RHC). Complaints were to be entered on the left-hand page only leaving the right “for replies thereto”.

Complaints relating to details of service and administration in the canteen were to be entered in the canteen complaints book which could be obtained on application at the counter.

31.1.59: Wishing to complain about the horrible potatoes which were served at lunch today and which tasted like nothing so much as soap, I asked for the canteen complaints book. I was informed that someone had recently complained about something else, and Mr Johnson (K. J. Johnson, House Governor) has the book pending inquiries. They were unable to say when it would be returned.

If the book is to be removed whenever it has been used I fail to see what purpose it will serve since I envisage numerous complaints. It looks as though the system is being sabotaged before it has properly begun.

Hilary Richards

2.2.59: Could some form of cover be obtained for *What's On*, in which it could be chained or fastened to prevent its present regular disappearance after one or two days?

John Cooper

Reply – A cover would not prevent the disappearance of *What's On*. A chain presumably would but would add an unwelcome note of the sordid. It is to be deplored that the book disappears, but we can only rely on the integrity of members of the common room and visitors.

R.H.C.

13.2.59: In a crowded refectory with no tables empty save three for ‘Nurses Only’, four registrars sat at one of them. One of the green coated domestic staff was quick to seize this opportunity to use her ‘fish wife’ technique on us. Is there no means whereby the unnecessary officiousness and rudeness of the canteen

junior staff can be contained and the organisation be made more elastic?

C. J. Wardle

Reply – There is no armour against these blows of fate. Serious complaints about matters arising in the canteen will reach authority only by recourse to the Canteen Complaints Book.

R.H.C.

6.3.59: We were proudly shown how to switch through the telephone to the new extension in the ‘outside’ duty doctors’ room, at lunchtime yesterday. On going up to the room I found no phone! I learned this morning that it had been put in the wrong room! Irresponsibility would seem to be a suitably descriptive word for this. Moreover the switchboard man did not know that an extension phone had been put in.

My second discovery, on going to bed, was that the bed had not been made, nor the room cleaned. Clean towels and one sheet and one pillow were put out and the maid had obviously forgotten. She was suitably apologetic this morning and I think no action need be taken.

However, it does seem that only one clean sheet and pillowcase are used each night, and I suggest that this cheese-paring practice should stop as from 6 March. I believe this was taken up with somebody or other a very long time ago.

S. I. Cohen

29.3.59: I note your answer of 7.3.59 regarding the telephone in the ‘outside’ duty doctors’ room. We are still telephoneless which is a great inconvenience. Also, a duplicate key for the dispensary would obviate the irritating “hunt the ‘inside’ doctor” game every time an out-patient has to be given drugs. I note your reply on this subject of 11.2.59 – what was the outcome of your talks?

Dora Black

29.3.59: Could the ‘outside’ duty doctors’ bedroom be supplied with soap please?

Dora Black

29.3.59: Is it not time that the problem of the inequality in the amount of duty done by doctors at Bethlem as compared with Maudsley doctors was discussed by "the authorities"? The difficulties seem to be that there are fewer doctors at Bethlem. This could be obviated by doctors working away from Maudsley being on duty at Bethlem – this would be just as logical as their being on duty here as they presumably would be no more familiar with the wards here than at Bethlem. If the duties at the two hospitals were made more equal, presumably Bethlem doctors would be prepared to take their turn at St Francis thus levelling the frequency of these duties for everyone.

A. W. Black

5.6.59: Two of the light bulbs in the Common Room have been non-functioning for two weeks now – could they be replaced please?

John Cooper

5.6.59: May we have a glass in the washroom for drinking water please? The JCR is overcrowded now. Could we have an extractor fan fitted?

W. O. McCormick

12.6.59: In the event of the suggested extractor fan being installed, can small members of the JCR be assured that its aperture is fitted with a net so that they will not be forcibly extracted?

H. Richards

Reply – Advisability of lead underwear will be considered.

R.H.C.

26.6.59: I wonder whether the junior members of staff can arrange a dinner or some other suitable equivalent function for Professor Lewis on the occasion of his recently awarded knighthood?

J. Dominican

W. G. Dewhurst

6.9.59: On BBC service the television makes a bad noise. Could it be replaced please?

W. O. McCormick

And there is also constant distortion on both channels.

S. Bourne

And the picture is so small!

S. A. McNamara

Why not a new TV set? The present one is an abomination.

C. E. Salter

Reply – I have discussed this extensively with administration. Previous application for new set was turned down because, at the time when it was on the point of being accepted, the people who repair these things said there was a lot of use left in the present one. No doubt they were concerned with maintaining a prof-

itable source of revenue. But I have raised the matter again, and the present set will again be assessed. There is not a great deal of sympathy with our cause, unfortunately.

R. H. Cawley

26.10.59: Would the Secretary be good enough to look at his reply of 2.2.59? Rarely do my intense academic pursuits permit the hitting of any high spots, but prior to such excursions the *What's On* is invariably missing.

R. Fox

27.10.59: When I first came here the porters used to rearrange, every six months, the names on the pigeon-holes so that they were in alphabetical order and thereby easy to find. It probably saved them a good deal of time in putting in the letters, too. Very few people shared pigeon-holes then because names of doctors no longer at Maudsley were weeded out. Can these practices be brought back again please?

Norman Kreitman

29.10.59: Wake up Secretary!

R. Fox

Reply – Why?

R.H.C.

6.11.59: Wot, no complaints.

R.H.C.

8.1.60: Now that Dr L. Clein has departed would it be possible to stop receiving *What's On* and invest the 1/- so saved in some less lurid publication.

C. J. Wardle

Reply – *What's On* was requested at a general meeting of registrars. Now that Dr L. Clein has departed, I suggest that a more immediately available scapegoat be found for unrestricted aggressive impulses.

R.H.C.

29.4.60: Is it possible that the cleaners mistakenly remove the current *What's On* when the new one arrives, not realising that this is a serious error? For instance, today (Friday) one can find out what is on from next Sunday, but one is in the dark as to today and tomorrow.

Griffith Edwards

2.6.60: The JCR smells of Registrars at most times. Could the cleaner be instructed to leave the windows OPEN – at least until winter – please?

W. McCormick

12.6.60: There is a brown box in the JCR – called a "television set" by some. Tonight the "tele. . ." is there OK and so is "vision" – hundreds of white lines on both stations. NO PICTURE OBTAINABLE!

S. Rawl

Reply – I regret that in the present state of things this type of “interlude” is unavoidable

Jack Dominion
(*new Secretary*)

2.7.60: Sir – could you, in co-operation with the administrative staff, arrange for the filling of the ink-wells?

Griffith Edwards

2.8.60: While the main library is closed, would it be possible at least to have the small reading room open during the lunch hour, so that we could look at current journals?

O. V. Briscoe

2.8.60: Sir, the price of the main course (including potatoes) in the canteen is 1s 10d. The price of the main course (excluding potatoes) is 1s 10d. This, although involving only a paltry profit for the catering company, is one more instance of their pinch-penny attitude. I hope sir, that you as a champion of the people will right this wrong.

Griffith Edwards

Reply – I think this matter should be tackled by the dining committee.

Jack Dominion

10.12.60: Sir, the *Daily Express* devotes its editorial space today to: (1) a plea for more corporal punishment: “The thug stands ready to use the cosh, the razor and the gun. Is the public to be denied protection?” (2) A plea for the preservation of the ½d: “It is a symbol of the guilt of politicians.” (3) A suggestion that Portuguese colonies should not be inspected by the UN trusteeship committee: “Britain joined with the pack which hounded the Belgians out of the Congo . . . now she looks on while UNO tries to meddle with placid lands.” (4) A short notice on the *heroism* of a footballer who, despite a fractured skull, wanted to go on playing.

Presumably the only reason why anyone in this common room reads the *Daily Express* is for its humour. However, the comic strips aren’t much good. Would you, after consulting public opinion, consider saving the 6 × 2½d per week, and spending the money on some weekly.

Griffith Edwards

Reply – If a majority of the members of the JCR show approval for this suggestion by appending their signature below Dr Edwards I shall be very pleased to follow it.

Jack Dominion

(There was no such support)

30.11.60: I see that someone has now successfully anaesthetised the TV set by causing a serious interruption of its arterial supply. I have heard from unofficial sources that Mr Johnson might be prepared to replace the set with a new one if it only would

expire completely. How can we possibly burn out the set if we have no plug? (This is not a plea to have the plug from the wireless transferred back again to the TV set!)

James Cockburn

2.12.60: Can a suitable letter of appreciation be sent to the joiner for his work on the new cabinet? The workmanship would seem to merit an acknowledgement.

O. V. Briscoe

4.12.60: I would like to be associated with the campaign for a new television set. Now that ‘*Maigret*’ can be seen every Monday night there is great urgency.

P. B. Storey

21.12.60: I wish to be the first to congratulate all those responsible for the new TV set.

L. Sharpe

Reply – It would appear that you are also the last. I shall convey your remarks to Mr Johnson and Mr Armitage.

Jack Dominion

30.12.60: Sir – with reference to Dr Heller’s letter of 21 November 1960. He claims that the *Daily Express* is well-informed. A few days ago that paper carried a report on the death of an ex-patient of this hospital. This report was grossly inaccurate. One wonders whether the Congo is reported any more accurately. In the name of the Empire, I appeal for a referendum.

Griffith Edwards

Reply – In the name of the JCR the answer would appear to be “No”.

Jack Dominion

21.2.61: I am not entirely happy about the standard of the hygiene arrangements for washing the lunch-time coffee cups. Stagnant water contained in a rather drab jug is employed for the immersion, the coffee-laden water then being removed by a damp cloth, for which the description “whiter than white” would definitely *not* apply.

Could this be improved please?

A. D. Isaacs

18.11.61: A larger waste paper basket in the JCR would be appropriate to greater tidiness and to the ‘Spirit of the Maudsley’.

Richard Fox

Reply – Enquiries have revealed that the present basket is the standard available size for the hospital.

Jack Dominion

23.11.61: I find that I have been put down for duty on Thursday, 30 November and on Friday, 1 December. I would be grateful if you Sir, as champion of the interests of members of the JCR, would consult with yourself, as the person responsible for preparing

the December duty list. I am sure that you will not seriously try to persuade yourself that it was impossible to fix the duty list in any other way.

Griffith Edwards

Reply – I do not claim infallibility. In the circumstances it was the best I could arrange. I apologise for the inconvenience

Jack Dominian

26.11.61: Thank you – I accept this explanation.

Griffith Edwards

30.11.61: Regarding 18.11.61, in that case get two baskets.

Richard Fox

Reply – I shall get three.

O. V. Hill

(new Secretary)

9.1.62: Sir, would any form of complaint do anything to improve the curious lethargy tinged with indifference, rudeness, and frank hostility that one seems to encounter from some of the ladies who serve behind the counter in what is called the canteen? Eating the food, is in itself, often enough, a macabre experience to be borne with forbearance – without the grim overture.

Jim Willis

Reply – I suspect that many of the ladies concerned are suffering from a mild version of ‘*Beziehungswahn in einen fremden Umgeburg*’. The service could be improved only by paying more than minimal wages and I think that this is not likely to happen – otherwise, complaint would only increase the sensitivity and ‘*Wahn*’ of the present staff.

O. V. Hill

28.2.62: Sir, the TV set is not working. May this be remedied? Cricket, tennis etc. are not far off.

James Willis

8.3.62: In view of the unequivocal recommendations of the Investigating Committee of the Royal College of Physicians, in the Report published today, I feel it to be wholly inappropriate that patients attending this hospital’s out-patient department should continue to be encouraged to smoke cigarettes. I propose that the House Governor be asked to remove the cigarette vending machine from the out-patient hall and consider whether cigarettes should remain on sale in the shops here and at the Bethlem.

M. Heller

21.3.62: Could we have the television set repaired please?

P. B. Storey

23.3.62: Would it be possible to have the coffee room off the dining room sound treated as the dining room itself is? The noise in it is deafening.

J. Tizard

23.3.62: The ‘Advance Towel Master’ in the lavatory seems to have got out of hand. It is spilling all over the floor. Could something be done about it?

3.4.62: The TV is not working, will you please mend it? Neither is the ‘automatic’ (so-called) toasting machine.

J. L. T. Birley

6.4.62: Next time the man comes to mend the TV could he be told that gentle pressure on the top right-hand side directed slightly inwards to mid-line prevents the disintegration of the picture. Dr Graham is a witness of this phenomenon.

P. B. Storey

7.4.62: Sir, the gent’s lavatory next door smells. This may be of interest to the marine biologist but remains a source of discomfort. I have noticed chaps in there with buckets etc trying to clean the place up but their efforts seem doomed to recurrent failure. Is this an insoluble problem?

Jim Willis

29.4.62: Once again the *New Statesman* has vanished within a few hours of publication. Is this the work of an Orpington resident? The problem has been solved in public libraries by provision of suitable covers. This has been proposed previously – any progress to report?

A. D. Isaacs

Reply – About two months ago we did acquire a hard cover for *What’s On* which disappeared one week after its arrival! We have almost recovered from our disappointment sufficiently to acquire another.

O. V. Hill

30.4.62: There are obviously many features of St Francis Hospital which could only be solved by an earthquake or some other major natural calamity. However, would it be possible meanwhile to get the television fixed and to provide a stethoscope with a diaphragm for D block.

Griffith Edwards

Reply – Our status at St F. is that of guest which makes it rather difficult for us to set their house in order as far as the TV is concerned. With respect to the other matter, the correct course would be to harangue a top day man into sharing your feelings and he could then agitate for the diaphragm.

O. V. Hill

2.5.62: My status at St Francis is not that of a guest – I am a registrar on duty. When I go for a weekend in the country I do not choose St Francis – and my hosts do not charge me for my meals.

Griffith Edwards

Reply – I should have said that the status was that of an *anomalous* guest.

O. V. Hill

15.5.62: Only 5 out of 12 lamps working in the JCR.

A. D. Isaacs

26.5.62: Sir, would it be possible to improve the general standard of white coats provided, by: (a) discarding the majority, which are badly frayed and getting new ones to replace them and (b) starching them at the laundry.

As things are at present I am embarrassed by having to inspect several coats before finding a wearable one. When I find a suitable one it looks shabby and dirty after two days wear.

John Brothwood

(There were many expressions of solidarity)

7.7.62: Could a hook be provided please in the lavatory on the inside duty room corridor?

L. Hemsli

(Underneath someone had written: 'feeling depressed?').

31.3.63: Sir, the fact that this book is largely taken up with complaints about missing electric light bulbs seems indicative of the current concept of the JCR. The JCR seems never to be conceived of as more than a room (a shabby room with no more character or convenience than the waiting room at Andover Town station). Consequently your duties as secretary of the JCR are identified with those of an unpaid caretaker.

Is it not time that the possibility was considered of the JCR having a wider meaning – a collection of people? Your time might then be more usefully taken up considering ways in which a collection of people can get something out of being a collection of people. The almost complete lack of any social life connected with the hospital, the complete lack of any idea of self-determination in the matter of training, are no doubt capable of some sort of historical explanation, but one cannot help wondering whether the JCR of what is, after all, a postgraduate centre of some standing, could find some radically different concept of what a JCR can be.

Griffith Edwards

Reply – I agree with you entirely (*vide* notice on door as a new breakthrough) – after Easter we shall be having a JCR meeting at which I hope you will express your feelings about the JCR and make proposals.

O. V. Hill

3.4.63: Sir, thank goodness I now have a clue as to the method of entry of the *Andover Times* into the JCR! It has been causing me concern for some time.

John Brothwood

Reply – We must all be grateful to Dr Edwards.

O. V. Hill

4.4.63: Following Dr Edwards' suggestion and the alacrity with which the JCR secretary has reacted to it, I fear that his mind will continue to be filled

by progressively higher thoughts to the increasing detriment of the material necessities of JCR life.

I entirely endorse Dr Edwards' plea for a corporate Junior Common Room. But need this entail a disregard for a junior common room fit to be lived in?

M. Heller

Reply – We are all very grateful to Dr Heller.

O. V. Hill

4.4.63: We are *not* all very grateful to Dr Hill.

M. Heller

Reply – Your standards are higher than my own. I would be delighted to delegate some of my functions to you – if you are willing to act to preserve your standards.

O. V. Hill

3.5.63: I. *State of inside duty doctor's room*

- (1) no carpet on floor
- (2) no dressing table
- (3) drawers locked in chest of drawers
- (4) no matches to light gas fire
- (5) no easy chair
- (6) bed not big enough for big man

II. *State of bathroom*

- (1) windowsill littered with razor blades, packets, razors, shaving cream
- (2) ancient dirty scarred tiled floor
- (3) sordid rubber bathmat
- (4) spring loaded taps very unsuitable for bathroom/sink
- (5) fixed stopper in sink is unsuitable
- (6) no washbasin apart from bathroom
- (7) no bathroom stool

No changes have been achieved in these in the past month. Not the least sign that the administration has taken notice since Dr Hill and I talked to Mr Armitage. In particular, the hospital at this moment must surely own many old carpets.

K. Wartnaby

Reply – We shall push them again.

O. V. Hill

6.6.63: Would you ask someone to clean out the (L) hand drawer in the Common Room table? It appears to be full of rubbish and has a most unpleasant smell suggestive of stale vomit.

John Brothwood

1.10.63: Please could we have a fire that works in the Common Room this winter?

R. E. Kendall

Reply – No man is an island.

O. V. Hill

Reply – Thank you! I wish I could feel in some way responsible!

R. E. Kendall

Undated: Psychiatric Social Workers are showing an increasing tendency to drop in and discuss their cases with registrars in the JCR. I would like to see this tendency diminished.

Colin McEvedy

I agree.

Anon.

Reply – We shall test the opinion of the JCR at the next General Meeting probably in December.

O. V. Hill

25.12.63: May I compliment the JCR on the originality of its decor especially the beige-and-dirt ceiling?

M. H. Lader

Reply – Thank you. It is to be loaned to the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

J. L. T. Birley
(new Secretary)

4.2.64: Is it beyond the ingenuity of the hospital administrative staff to devise a system whereby one could be provided with a white coat of the appropriate size without spending 20 minutes trying each one on in turn in a method of successive approximation.

M. H. Lader

Reply – Probably not. There is a shortage of white coats which should be remediable.

J. L. T. Birley

6.2.64: Why have not all members of staff been sent the new *National Formulary* and current copy of the *Prescriber's Journal*?

A. J. Costello

Reply – I don't know. Anyone who hasn't had one should tell Mrs Faith or Mr Armitage – preferably both.

J. L. T. Birley

17.4.64: For the past three days the lavatory (gents) has smelt like a stable. Please could this be remedied?

M. Heller

20.4.64: The white coat situation is deteriorating as are the white coats. It appears that the shortage of white coats is not being remedied. How much longer must this disgrace continue?

M. H. Lader

26.4.64: It is now over a year since we last had one of Dr Heller's terse comments on the lighting of the JCR. Has he given up in disgust? Four out of 12 bulbs are now dead. (Name indecipherable).

6.5.64: How dare the gentleman (or lady) who writes in red ink and whose signature is indecipherable take my name in vain? Actually, there is, I understand, a system in operation whereby the bulbs are inspected each week and replacements immediately made. I note (with pride, for it was my suggestion) that at the moment only one out of 12 bulbs is defunct.

M. Heller

26.7.64: Would you ensure that the television gets the treatment which it so richly deserves.

See 6.8.59 *Sic transit* . . .

D.G.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Professor R. H. Cawley for his kind assistance in the preparation of this article.

*"Few (problems), if any, are difficult of solution.
The difficulty, all but invariably, is in confronting them."*

J. K. GALBRAITH