

new Mental Health Services Act which provides the certified patient with a speedy and impartial appeal process. Fortunately the new Act contains no provisions giving social workers ridiculous powers.

GEOFFREY GLEW

*South Hill Medical Centre
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan
Canada*

DEAR SIRs

Initially I read the exchange of correspondence between Drs Kelly and Gad quoting Dr Azuonye (*Bulletin*, October 1987) with my usual sang-froid. Only three weeks later, however, having had two applications refused for admission under Section 3, to the amazement of the two general practitioners involved and myself, I had to fall heavily on the side of Drs Azuonye and Gad.

Even risking allegations of professional snobbery, risking my wounded pride, pandering to my paranoia and, God forbid, risking Dr Kelly's disbelief, I have to add my voice to what I see as a scandalous situation where my patients are now either frankly put at risk or allowed to deteriorate against my better wishes.

STEPHEN H. SHAW

*Stanley Royd Hospital
Wakefield, West Yorkshire*

Dr Kelly replies

I am fully aware that there are a number of social workers who make things difficult for psychiatrists. Some of them are frankly anti-medical and some social workers do hold unusual, idiosyncratic, and weird beliefs. To be bombarded with numerous examples is not particularly helpful or informative and if you published an article generally supporting psychiatrists and criticising social workers in a journal for social workers, I am sure many social workers would write in with stories of unfortunate encounters with difficult psychiatrists. Therefore, I am not particularly surprised about this type of response from psychiatrists.

What is slightly worrying is that by citing dramatic and bizarre examples, psychiatrists may be missing the point and I felt the main message I was trying to put across in my earlier communication was that adequate education and communication with social workers from an early stage in their careers will help to eradicate many of the problems already stated. To react defensively against social workers and other members of the multi-disciplinary team plays into the hands of anti-medical and anti-psychiatric individuals, who will then use the so-called conservatism (closing ranks) of the medical profession as a stick with which to beat it about the head. Goodness knows, with the team approach to psychiatry and upsurge of community care, psychiatrists have enough to deal with rather than arguing fruitlessly with non-medical colleagues.

Although I am sincerely flattered that Dr Shaw risks offending my sensibilities in stating his viewpoint, I should repeat my plea that relations between psychiatrists, social workers, and other non-medical members of the multi-disciplinary team, and their responsibilities, need to be discussed and reviewed at a much wider level. Unfortunately, it is at the moment difficult to envisage a forum which is fully appropriate for this.

CHRIS KELLY

*Whitchurch Hospital
Cardiff*

Professor Michael Simpson

DEAR SIRs

The action of the College in preventing the address of Professor Michael Simpson on the consequences of torture of political detainees in South Africa at the recent Quarterly Meeting is regrettable. Setting aside the discourtesy, the action is inconsistent, self-defeating and politically misguided. Dr Anatoly Koryagin was rightly given the opportunity to report on the abuse of psychiatry in the USSR. It is contradictory that Professor Simpson should not be able to present his courageous work, not on psychiatric abuse, but the psychiatric management of victims of the abuse of political power.

The failure to acknowledge this work does not represent a position of either scientific or political integrity but more a capitulation through fear of controversy and dissension. It is deplorable that the College should in this way have failed to support the practice of psychiatry in politically complex and dangerous areas, and appear to be colluding with the agencies of suppression and neglect.

S. E. BAUMANN

*114 South Hill Park
London NW3*

Dr Birley replies

DEAR SIRs

Dr Baumann's letter raises the issue of the interpretation of the Council Resolution on the Nassau Accord (*Bulletin*, March 1987 and July 1987). It was put to me, very forcibly, by a number of responsible people that it was ironic and contradictory to be inviting a speaker from an "apartheid university" to be addressing the College and at the same time be welcoming a person who had stood out against political oppression in Russia. The point was also made that to do so would indicate our lack of concern by the College for the ethnic minorities in this country. I fully accept that my decision was a controversial and also a difficult one. Perhaps we should allow controversial speakers from any country and with any point of view to our meetings in the future. Controversy and dissension at least in the right doses is healthy. An overdose can be destructive.

J. L. T. BIRLEY
President