

PARLIAMENTARY NEWS

An account of the debate on the Mental Health Act appeared in our May issue. The following covers other debates and Parliamentary Questions bearing on mental health from January 1979 to the Dissolution.

Consultants

An analysis of the distribution of Distinction Awards in England and Wales was given in a written answer on 9 March. The figures refer to the position at the end of 1977.

There were 1,492 consultants in Mental Health, who constitute 11.2 per cent of all consultants; this number exceeds that of consultants in General Medicine, and also that for General Surgery. Twelve hold A Plus awards, 25 have A awards, 86 B awards, and 255 C awards. The percentage holding awards is below average, being 8.0 of the total; other specialties with a low percentage appear to be Geriatrics and Community Medicine.

In another written answer, on 3 April, particulars were given of *Domiciliary Visits* carried out by consultants in the North-West Thames Region. For Mental Illness 4,077 visits were made—the largest number for one specialty; for Mental Handicap only 5 visits. It would appear that consultants in Mental Handicap are at a considerable financial disadvantage in this respect.

Mental Handicap

On 8 March *Mr Ennals* made a long statement on the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into mental handicap nursing and care chaired by Mrs Peggy Jay. He said that the Committee had made radical proposals for the manpower required, including a new form of staff training, under a single training body. Pending any major changes, the Government would discuss with the present training bodies how their arrangements might be adapted. The Government recognized that in any event an NHS service must continue to be provided and that trained nurses would continue to have a big role. Changes in the pattern of residential care would be continually reviewed in consultation with the National Development Group. Questions to be asked included the changing incidence and prevalence of mental handicap, the

balance between health and local authority services, and by what stages changes in the pattern of provision could be brought about. The fact that plans would necessarily be constrained by the availability of resources was, of course, also mentioned.

Alcoholism

On 9 February *Mr Stallard* initiated an Adjournment Debate on the Government's decision not to fund a proposed detoxification centre at St Thomas's Hospital. He was supported by *Mr J. Tilley* and by *Sir Bernard Braine*, who is Chairman of the National Council on Alcoholism. In his reply for the DHSS, *Mr Deakin* explained that the Government only provided direct funding for experimental centres; the proposed centre resembled existing ones too closely and also was to be expensively staffed; the local health authority were doubtful about its ability to take over the running of the centre; and the results from Manchester and Leeds had not so far been encouraging—a full evaluation of these was expected in 1981. Detoxification was, in any case, now being carried out in many hospitals as part of treatment.

The College's Report *Alcohol and Alcoholism* was mentioned several times in the course of another Adjournment Debate, on the prevention of alcoholism, initiated on 23 March by *Sir George Young* (referred to in one place in *Hansard* as the 'Hon. Member for Action' and now one of the Under-Secretaries at the DHSS). He strongly advocated the raising of the price of alcoholic drinks as a means of reducing consumption and so also the incidence of alcoholism, as well as a more vigorous educational policy. *Sir Bernard Braine* again spoke in support. Again *Mr Deakin* was entrusted with the task of replying, and to the present reviewer his speech appeared to be a masterpiece of obfuscation. Quoting *Sir Martin Roth's* statement, in his foreword to the College's report, that Government intervention would achieve little without a parallel change in personal attitudes, *Mr Deakin* fell back on 'the general implications for the Government's fiscal and industrial policies' of what was proposed, and promised a Green Paper, not yet fully drafted, for the purpose of encouraging public debate.

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