

I suggest that we have reached the stage where no progress is being achieved, and it is surely time that we pushed forward with further research. All those engaged with ECT would appear to be trying to achieve two things:

- (1) Still further improvement in clinical efficacy.
- (2) Reduction in side effects.

May I suggest the following subjects as a possible interest to those concerned with ECT:

- (1) The use of tryptophan with ECT.
- (2) An attempt to reduce the amount of electrical energy used by means of:
  - (a) Photic stimulation;
  - (b) Evoked potentials;
  - (c) Positive polarization by DC current before applying the shock.
- (3) Investigation into the path of the current taken in unilateral ECT. This could be done on cats or rats.
- (4) Further investigation into electric parameters generally, for which we should have to go to the neurophysiologists. Quite a considerable amount of this has been done, especially on the octopus which has the great advantages of no skull and large simple neuronal masses.
- (5) Further pursuit of the excellent investigations that have been done on depression and metabolism.

S. M. CANNICOTT.

*Mendip Hospital,  
Wells,  
Somerset*

#### SELF-APPLIED CONSTRICTING BANDS

DEAR SIR,

In their interesting presentation of a number of schizophrenics and patients with severe brain lesions, Dawson-Butterworth, Wallen and Gittleson (*Journal*, November 1969, pp. 1255-9) emphasize 'the almost complete absence of any complaint of pain or discomfort despite often quite severe injury. This needs further elucidation'. Actually this phenomenon is well documented in the literature. It was first described by Stengel and Schilder in 1928 as 'pain asymbolia'. References to it can be found in a number of publications, among them by Mayer-Gross, Slater and Roth, by Szasz, and by Weinstein and Kahn. Schilder has demonstrated the connection between pain experiences and body image. Those patients whom he described as having asymbolia for pain also have a very incomplete reaction to dangerous situations in general.

MILO TYNDEL.

*Department of Psychiatry,  
University of Toronto, Canada*

#### REFERENCES

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- Mayer-Gross, W., Slater, E., and Roth, M. (1954). *Clinical Psychiatry*. Cassell and Co. Ltd., London.
- SZASZ, TH. (1951). *Pain and Pleasure*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
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#### NURSES FOR CHILDREN'S UNITS

DEAR SIR,

Recruitment and training of staff to work in in-patient units for disturbed children and adolescents is a matter which is becoming increasingly important at the present time. The Child Psychiatry Section of the R.M.P.A. is currently engaged in an investigation of the situation and hopes to be able to make a statement, with recommendations for future plans.

One of the first steps is to discover what are the staffing arrangements in units throughout the country. Dr. Christopher Wardle is collecting data and has already circularized psychiatrists known to be in charge of in-patient units for children and adolescents. There may well be some units which have been inadvertently missed, and the Section would be most grateful if anyone who is in charge of a unit, or who may be planning to start one in the near future, and who has not had a letter from Dr. Wardle would write to him at The Child Guidance Clinic, 97, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2NE. He is seeking information on numbers of patients and staff, both registered and non-registered, the qualifications of registered nurses employed and the designation of non-registered nurses and their rates of pay. He is also interested in methods of recruitment and advertising, forms of in-service training and other training programmes and the qualities sought after in the selection of staff.

ANNE BOLTON.

*Department of Psychological Medicine,  
Child Psychiatry,  
The Middlesex Hospital,  
London, W.1*

#### GOFFMAN ON ASYLUMS

DEAR SIR,

I must protest at the grossly unfair review of Goffman's, *Asylums* by Dr. H. C. Beccle (*Journal*, January 1970, pp. 111-12). In my opinion, *Asylums* is a book of fundamental importance. Many of us who have worked through those years during which

mental institutions have largely improved surely owe a debt for the valuable insights provided by this and similar works.

Barton (1959) listed the factors commonly associated with Institutional Neurosis as follows: loss of contact with the outside world; enforced idleness; bossiness of medical and nursing staff; loss of personal friends, possessions and personal events; drugs; ward atmosphere and loss of prospects outside the Institution.

All these are studied by Goffman and the socio-psychopathological interaction of these factors amongst staff and patients are brilliantly analysed.

Surely even the best of our mental hospitals retain some of the useless, even harmful, residue of institutional traditions and further improvement is facilitated by a study of such works.

Dr. Beccle's review portrays a complacency which is surprising, considering the volume of criticism lately levelled at our less fortunate institutions where a deficiency of resources has resulted in a poor environment for the patients and the inevitable retention of some of the worst features of institutional life. Furthermore, the history of psychiatry clearly shows that periods of enlightenment and reform have at times been followed by eras of regression and repression. Therefore, a continual vigilance will always be necessary.

One welcomes the many important advances made over recent years, but regrets that the institutional mind too readily accepts the wide gap that persists between institutional and community standards of life, a gap that easily widens when conditions improve in the outside community.

CHARLES I. FINN.

*Leavesden Hospital,  
Abbots Langley,  
Watford, Herts*

#### STENGEL PRIZE

DEAR SIR,

The first Stengel Prize will be awarded in 1970 to the candidate submitting the best written report of

research in a field related to psychiatry carried out during an appointment in any branch of medicine held in the area of the Sheffield Regional Hospital Board. Preference will be given to candidates qualified for not more than eight years at the time of the study.

Reports should be submitted in a form suitable for publication, and should be approximately 5,000 words in length, exclusive of graphs and tables. Two copies, together with the date of qualification and a brief statement of the appointment during which the research was carried out, should be addressed to me at the address below.

The closing date is 1 May, 1970.

C. P. SEAGER.

*Hon. Secretary, Committee of Management,  
Stengel Prize Fund*

*Whiteley Wood Clinic,  
Woofindin Road,  
Sheffield S10 3TL*

#### POINT AND COUNTERPOINT

DEAR SIR,

It was interesting to compare the reviews of *Sense and Symbol* in the *Journal*—Volume 114, page 1044 and Volume 116, page 116.

'A generally impressive volume' or 'totally unacceptable' or perhaps different books.

G. H. B. BAKER.

*Long Grove Hospital,  
Epsom, Surrey*

[These were respectively the American and the British editions of the book by Professor Miller and were sent us separately by the two publishers concerned. It was not realized at the time that these were one and the same, and, owing to an error, the author's name was omitted in the first of the two reviews. As Dr. Baker points out, readers will have had the benefit of two widely differing critical opinions. *Ed.*]