

Correspondence

The Royal College examination and award of qualification

DEAR SIRS

I read with some disquiet the letter from Dr Mathew concerning the Royal College examination and award of qualification (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, 1991, 15, 699–700) and I would like to make the following comments.

Dr Mathew claims that in the study by Bhate (1990) overseas graduates take between five and eight years to pass the membership examination after they enter psychiatric practice. I would comment that this is not limited to overseas doctors and many non-overseas doctors take this length of time to get the membership examination. He claims that this could result in unfortunate candidates being forced to leave without having any qualification to confirm the psychiatric training they had in the United Kingdom. I would comment that it is not necessary to have a degree to confirm the psychiatric training received as this would surely appear on a curriculum vitae and indeed referees from the United Kingdom may well be used when people return to their country of origin to seek further employment.

He comments that the Government's policy of creating staff grade posts is a good move and goes on to say that doctors are forced to opt out of psychiatry when they exhaust their examination attempts. But this is hardly the case as surely the staff grade appointment is one option for those who do not pass the membership and a career in psychiatry can be continued.

Although there is no further degree obtainable in psychiatry, as Dr Mathew notes, he suggests a rather convoluted plan of action to counteract this "deficiency". As a recently graduated member of the College and having taken the exams when the format of the examination was changing and been involved in the subsequent confusion, etc. surrounding the same, both on the part of examiners and candidates, I feel that his suggestions are at best unrealistic. Although a second degree (e.g. DPM) would undoubtedly be welcome by those who are, due to unfortunate circumstances, unable to complete the membership examination, Dr Mathew's method of implementation leaves one with a sense of confusion that it is difficult to dispel.

Finally, I totally disagree with his comment that more doctors would continue in psychiatry but should they be able to obtain a psychiatric qualification this

would improve health care in general, and I note that Dr Mathew gives no reference and no evidence in support of such a claim.

JANE O'DWYER

*Meanwood Park Hospital
Leeds LS6 4QB*

DEAR SIRS

Dr O'Dwyer disregarded the salient point in my letter, that the current immigration and membership examination regulations prevent some, mainly overseas doctors, from sitting for the membership examination on the maximum eligible number of occasions. She claimed that many non-overseas doctors take five to eight years to pass the membership examination after they enter psychiatric practice but does not support this statement with any reference or personal experience.

She concluded "that it is not necessary to have a degree to confirm one's psychiatric training which they have received as this would surely appear on a curriculum vitae and indeed references from the United Kingdom may well be used when people return to their country of origin to seek further employment". Her judgement on this seems fallacious, and she does not appear to understand how medical systems operate in third world countries. If one can be appointed to a suitable job on the basis of curriculum vitae alone I wonder why doctors bother to take the membership examination. Procuring a British degree in psychiatry is highly valued all over the world.

Also, although staff grade posts do not require any formal postgraduate qualification, in practice they are usually filled by doctors who have membership but been unable to procure a higher training post for personal reasons. The difficulty arises only when a doctor takes up staff psychiatrist post before passing the membership. She states that she was confused going through the new format of the examination. Fortunately, this has not been experienced by many of us who took the same examination which may explain why she found it so difficult to grasp the method of implementation suggested by me. She is welcome to suggest a better method of implementation.

The main aim of my letter was to bring to the attention of the Royal College of Psychiatrists the need to have an alternate form of qualification other than the membership examination, similar to the one awarded by most of the Royal Colleges in the United Kingdom (eg DA; DLO; DGM; DCH; DTM&H;