

President's letter



I have been fortunate enough to preside at two occasions which owed their existence to the hard work of my predecessors. Dr Anatoly Koryagin's visit to the October Quarterly Meeting represented the culmination of long years of patient effort by Kenneth Rawnsley (and his colleagues on the Special Committee on Unethical Practices, and in particular its first Chairman, Peter Sainsbury). We were left in no doubt that there were still abuses of psychiatry in Russia but also that there were real possibilities of change. I had met Dr Koryagin briefly in Chicago in May and it was gratifying to see him looking much fitter than on that occasion. His courage and dignity impressed us all.

Shortly afterwards we held a very successful consensus meeting on Alcohol and Alcohol Problems which led to an agreed statement supported by representatives from all the Medical Royal Colleges, The British Psychological Society, the Health Education Authority, and organisations concerned with alcohol problems. This received wide publicity and continues to reverberate; for instance, the Health Education Authority has come out against extending licensing hours. Thomas Bewley had initiated this meeting, and the patient and tactful work of Bruce Ritson and Vanessa Cameron was responsible for its success.

My own contribution to the 'higher profile' which we are seeking to adopt was the deputation to 10 Downing Street to present a petition against cuts in the NHS. Our 'minder' and supporter was Nicholas Winterton, a Conservative MP, who has been an active and sympathetic member of the Social Services Committee. It was followed by a press

conference and, four days later, by the announcement of a short-term extra package of £100 million. Not a solution by any means but an indication, perhaps, of recognition of a problem which had been highlighted by three other Presidents. Some members have written to me expressing anxiety that our College had been 'left out'. It is important that we are seen to speak both for our own services and for the NHS as a whole. We have made it clear to the DHSS that our 'priority' services are no longer protected, and have provided evidence of this from all over the country.

Our second Christmas lecture for young people—'Crime and Insanity' by Professor John Gunn—was once again a sell-out. We are thinking of using a larger venue than the Royal Society, agreeable and convenient though that is. Should there not be some Regional occasions of the same nature? There is plenty of talent for a quantity of lectures, to lively audiences, within the bounds of Aberdeen, Southampton, Cambridge and Galway.

What is needed in every district is the education of managers and planners—a more hard-bitten audience than the youngsters at the Christmas lecture. I have been reading Dr Peter Horrock's final report as Director of the Health Advisory Service. It certainly repays careful study. In it he remarks that "participation and leadership in the process of change needs to be regained by the representative professional bodies, not least by the Royal College of Psychiatrists". Members may or may not agree with this statement, but it cannot be ignored. Part of the report, and Dr Horrock's amplification of his statement, will appear in the May *Bulletin*. The impending changes foreshadowed in 'Achieving a Balance' and the Griffiths Report (not published as I write this) need all our skills and creative energy in maintaining both our educational activities, and in providing a service. Meanwhile, I have asked our new Vice President, Donald Dick, to head up a small group to prepare a document on the basic principles, functions and ingredients of a district psychiatric service. At present, there seems to be no overall College guidance on this or, if it is, it is scattered about.

By the time this is published we will be near to holding our first educational meeting with Health Administrators, a meeting on 'Schizophrenia' held jointly between the College and the Institute of Health Services Management. There might well be a case for local meetings along these lines.

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