

Psychiatry in eastern Libya: people's attitudes towards psychiatric disorders

Sir: In "Psychiatry in Libya: eastern region", (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, January 1995, 19, 48-49), Dr El-Badri referred to the development and practice of psychiatry in eastern Libya. I would like to stress people's attitudes towards psychiatric disorders in Libya, in particular the dissolution of stigma which has begun. Mental illnesses are now widely recognised as diseases; the medical model has taken root in people's minds. People seek advice much more than before, for major and minor psychiatric disorders; patients' relatives are more prepared to agree to admission once advised, and patients' compliance has increased. The recognition of psychiatric disorders as medical conditions is also acknowledged by traditional faith healers who used to attribute psychiatric illnesses to supernatural forces alone. Some healers now ask their clients to seek psychiatric help. I have seen prescription forms written by healers for amitriptyline and vitamin B. While uncommon practice, this behaviour reflects the attitude of this non-medical profession who are still actively involved in the management of the mentally ill.

Psychiatry is now an essential part of the medical school curriculum, enabling the medical profession to convey the psychiatric message to the public on a scientifically sound basis.

Although psychiatry is still unpopular among medical students and hence there is a shortage of local psychiatrists, there are some indicators that the situation is improving. Before 1980 there were no local doctors practising psychiatry, by 1990 there were nine local doctors, two of whom were qualified psychiatrists.

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Section 37 Hospital Order

Sir: I recently had a patient on a Section 37 Hospital Order, which was lifted on appeal to the hospital managers in the first six months.

While I would have thought it entirely proper for a Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT) or a court of law to discharge such a patient, I think it anomalous that an essentially lay body could do the same so soon after a court's decision.

I also wonder why Section 37 patients cannot apply to an MHRT in the first six months.

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