phase was not pushing the cost of the DLP above the cost of standard services.

PROFESSOR MARTIN KNAPP, *Institute of Psychiatry, CEMH, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8BB*

Psychiatric training in the Netherlands

Sir: Dr Hall and Dr Robertson (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, **20**, 482) have accurately depicted training experience in the Netherlands. Their report, however, contains one important mistake. The MRCPsych is not recognised as a postgraduate specialist qualification in the Netherlands, nor in any other EU country. Recognition of specialist status was, and is, entirely contingent on obtaining the certificate of Completion of Specialist Training, issued by the UK General Medical Council in accordance with articles 2–7 of EU Directive No 75/363 of 16 June, 1975 (the Second Medical Directive). Aquisition of this certificate certainly does not represent a 'fast lane', as it is issued only after a sufficient amount of time of clinical experience at UK Senior Registrar level after passing the MRCPsych. Currently, a Dutch doctor in the UK will have to spend at least six years in training to obtain the CCST (18 months more than in the Netherlands): a minimum of three years in order to obtain the MRCPsych, and three more as a senior registrar.

JIM VAN OS, *Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry, University of Maastricht, PO Box 616, 6200 MD Maastricht, The Netherlands*

Second medical recommendations and good practice

Sir: The Code of Practice states "Other than in exceptional circumstances, the second medical recommendation should be provided by a doctor with previous acquaintance of the patient". In the absence of such an individual then this recommendation should be made by an "approved" doctor. What constitutes "previous acquaintance"? To what degree should pragmatism justify deviation from clear guidelines?

GPs are increasingly utilising Deputising Services to provide out of hours cover for their patients. Thus requests for emergency Mental Health Act (MHA) assessments are frequently being made by deputising doctors who will almost certainly have never encountered the patient before and most probably will not have had access to their GP notes. Should such doctors be providing second recommendations for admission on the tenuous grounds that they have "previous acquaintance" by merit of interviewing the patient perhaps an hour before the "approved" doctor comes to undertake an assessment? Similar dilemmas confront GPs who may never have met a patient on their list. Can perusal of previous medical notes achieve "acquaintance"?

I have encountered varied opinions among psychiatrists, GPs and social workers regarding these issues, resulting in different actions in comparable clinical situations. If one adheres rigidly to the Code of Practice then an increase in Section 12 approved doctors, particularly GPs available out of hours, would be desirable. The increased utilisation of Section 4 might be considered an alternative. Davies (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, August 1996, **20**; 502) has suggested other reasons why Section 4 may often be more appropriate than Section 2. Psychiatrists will be asked by GPs to provide guidance regarding the MHA and thus we should lead the debate as to what is contemporary good practice.

MARK MCCARTNEY, *Psychiatric Unit, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham NG7 2UH*

Section 4 or 5(2)

Sir: Davies (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, August 1996, **20**, 502) rightly claims that the Code of Practice is being interpreted as pressing us to implement Section 2 rather than Section 4, use of the latter being seen by Purchasers as a sign of poor practice. However, interpretation is subjective and can lead to confusion. The Code (8.9) also says "Section 5(2) should only be invoked if the use of sections 2, 3 and 4 is not practicable or safe . . .". For in-patients section 4 can be both practicable and safe, so should it be used instead of 5(2) as the Code advises? We all realise that the, usually helpful, Code should not be so interpreted – this paragraph may soon be changed. The issue is relevant, our recent audit showed that 50% of our Section 5(2)s, could have been Section 4s since an approved social worker (ASW) was on site when the doctor made the 5(2) recommendation. "The attendance of senior psychiatrists at unearthly hours of the night" cannot be demanded by Purchasing authorities and social services. What is required is a rota staffed by Section 12 doctors who do not have to work the next day. This applies to ASWs. Finally, has the Purchaser arranged a service by senior psychiatrists to the police station?

M. T. MALCOLM, *Consultant Psychiatrist, Clatterbridge Hospital, Bebington, Wirral L63 4JY*

High dose antipsychotic prescribing

Sir: Chaplin & McGuigan (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, August 1996, **20**, 452–454) address the issue of

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