nurses operating entirely independently of hospitals or psychiatrists.

Psychologists have been heard suggesting that current psychiatric population norms are excessive and that not fewer psychiatrists but a ten-fold increase in psychologists is required. These psychologists would take direct referrals from all sources, undertake most of the clinical and administrative research in the field and believe they are better equipped than psychiatrists for management.

Similar claims emerge from other professions and we are in danger that such group rivalries will destroy the possibility of real multidisciplinary working. Most dangerously we face the possibility of parallel services developed by each profession and all clamouring for an ever larger share of resources yet providing competing and expensively overlapping services.

The second part of the document contains an outline of regional authority strategic plans and an attempt to assess progress. If nothing else this illustrates the limitations of the performance indicators currently available.

There is also a sample of district approaches which is broadly encouraging, but difficult to evaluate as the distinction between pious hope and evaluated achievement is not always clear.

Altogether this volume is a good starting point for the debate on the future of psychiatric services, we cannot afford to wait until either adequate financial resources are available or for the fruits of improved recruitment and training to improve the quality and swell the size of our consultant ranks. We must ensure that inherent conservatism and self interest, wherever they are found, do not produce a structure of service which fails to provide first class care for our patients and a satisfying and useful role for the young people now drawn to our profession.

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Children and Family Breakdown—Custody and Access: Guidelines—The Need for a New Approach by Robin Benians, Trevor Berry, David Gouling and Peter Johnson. Discussion document prepared for 'Families Need Fathers'. 1983. Pp 30. £1.50.

The divorce rate in England and Wales is currently the highest in the EEC, and it is estimated that some 200,000 children are affected each year by their parents' divorce.

The courts make decisions on the custody of dependent children, often without the benefit of welfare reports or appropriate professional evidence. But even when such evidence is available, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between that which stems from studies of the issues involved, and that from opinions that professional workers derive from the knowledge and prejudices of their own personal lives.

In contested custody cases there is a tendency to award the sole custody of a child to one parent, and subsequently there is frequently a desire to 'banish' the remaining parent from the child's life.

The organization, 'Families Need Fathers', have sponsored this discussion document, stressing the place of fathers in a child's life in the vast majority of cases where custody has been given to the mother. They urge the case for decisions of *joint custody,* even when care and control is given to one parent.

Marriage can be dissolved, parenthood cannot; and the authors quote research which shows emphatically that children whose parents separate and divorce do not regard themselves as having only one parent. Nevertheless, 40 per cent of children lose contact with their non-custodial parent within two years of divorce.

Dr Benians has shown that many convincing ploys are available to the custodial parent to frustrate any decisions or arguments regarding access; but access is not a privilege of the disputing parent; it is a necessity to the child. When the child loses contact with one parent, there is also a loss of family connections. Both parents originally provide the child with a separate network of relatives; and loss of contact between the child of one parent is likely to lead to severance from aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents on one side of the family. Knowledge of the extended family is vital to the developing child's sense of identity.

Access is discussed as a temporary transfer of care and control to the parent with whom the child does not normally live. It is recommended that access should be considered in terms of visits, overnight staying, and holidays. It is not always easy for the custodial parent to agree this, and the handbook puts forward the idea of 'conciliation' (which must not be confused with 'reconciliation'. This accepts that the parental relationship has broken down, and is an attempt to assist the separating and divorcing couples to reach agreed decisions about their future roles in relation to one another, and their children.

The booklet finishes with a summary of recommendations which include the securing of contact between the child and the extended family, as well as with the parent with whom the child does not mainly live. Access for little children should be on the basis of little and often. A further point is that all people connected with making decisions for children should be familiar with common excuses made to avoid access. This is particularly important because breaks in access often lead to intense difficulties in re-starting it.

The handbook compresses considerable information and argument into a small space, and the reader should not lose sight of the fact that, although the term 'non-custodial parent' is used impartially, in practical terms it is the father with whom contact is most likely to be lost.

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