



columns

the columns

correspondence

Stigma of mental illness among Chinese people

I read with interest the paper by Chung & Wong 'Experiences of stigma among Chinese mental health patients in Hong Kong' (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, December 2004, **28**, 451–454). They cited as one limitation of their study that their results might not extrapolate to the Chinese population in other countries. A preliminary assessment of the mental health needs of Chinese young people in Birmingham, UK (Chinese National Healthy Living Centre, 2005) revealed that stigma remains an important issue among Chinese in the UK. The assessment concluded that the majority of Chinese young people and their parents perceive mental illness as being 'crazy' and associated with violence. This finding agrees with the conclusion of Chung & Wong's paper that many Chinese patients have experienced stigma and discrimination in Hong Kong.

Chung & Wong stated that the term 'mental illness' can be associated with stigma, yet they used the same term in their study questionnaire. In their clinical implications section, they have sensibly replaced the term 'mental illness' with 'mental health problems', which is a less stigmatising term. Their findings might have been more positive if they had used the term 'mental health problems' instead of 'mental illness' in their questionnaire.

CHINESE NATIONAL HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE (2005) *A Preliminary Assessment of the Mental Health Needs of Chinese Young People in Birmingham*. Birmingham: Chinese National Healthy Living Centre.

CHUNG, K. F. & WONG, M. C. (2004) Experience of stigma among Chinese mental health patients in Hong Kong. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **28**, 451–454.

Robert Fung Staff Grade Psychiatrist, Mental Health Unit, Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow, Middlesex HA13UJ (e-mail: robertfung@doctors.org.uk)

Cranial computed tomographic scans in elderly people – how often do they influence clinical management?

Fielding's study 'The value of cranial computed tomography in old age

psychiatry: a review of the results of 178 consecutive scans' (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, January 2005, **29**, 21–23) assessed the value of cranial computed tomographic (CT) scans in the elderly population and evaluated the recommendations of the Royal College of Psychiatrists on the selection of patients for scanning. However, the article was erroneous in stating that the College recommends all patients to be scanned unless the 'history is typical OR history greater than 1 year'. The College in fact recommends that all patients receive a scan 'unless the patient has a history of more than a year AND there is a typical clinical picture' (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1995).

The author concluded that the study added validity to the College's criteria and suggested that cranial CT scans might influence patient management. I conducted an audit review of 56 cranial CT scans in elderly people. In 51%, clinical management was not influenced by the CT scan. This group included those who were unwilling to receive treatment. Fielding stated that the prevalence of truly reversible causes of dementia identified by cranial CT is extremely low. In support of this, in my audit review none of the scan results showed evidence of potentially reversible causes of dementia.

FIELDING, S. (2005) The value of cranial computed tomography in old age psychiatry: a review of the results of 178 consecutive scans. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **29**, 21–23.

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS (1995) *Consensus Statement on the Assessment of an Elderly Person with Suspected Cognitive Impairment by a Specialist Old Age Psychiatry Service* (Council Report CR49). London: Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Anne M. Aboaja Senior House Officer in Psychiatry, Nottingham Psychotherapy Unit, 114 Thorneywood Mount, Mapperley, Nottingham NG3 2PZ

Malignant alienation

I read with interest the letter by Darryl Watts 'Malignant alienation – a concept that has not yet arrived' (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, December 2004, **28**, 459). I also read the earlier editorial on malignant alienation by Watts & Morgan (1994). It would appear to me that the term

'malignant alienation' does describe a group of patients who according to Watts and Morgan are 'hard to like'. I believe that quite a number of these patients overlap with persons who would now be diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. The major problems in relationships with others, and the loss of sympathy from staff who perceive their behaviour as being unreasonable, would fit with Asperger syndrome. It is hardly surprising if this continues that there could be a suicidal outcome. I would suggest that patients with this description 'malignant alienation' be assessed for Asperger syndrome.

WATTS, D. (2004) Malignant alienation – A concept that has not yet arrived? *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **28**, 459.

WATTS, D. & MORGAN, G. (1994) Malignant alienation: Dangers for patients who are hard to like. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **164**, 11–15.

Michael Fitzgerald Henry Marsh Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Trinity College, Dublin

Do we really need a duty consultant?

Do consultant psychiatrists really need to provide a conventional out of hours service? How often does a clinical insight, resulting from a face-to-face, out-of-hours interview with the duty consultant psychiatrist, genuinely contribute to the management of a situation, in a way that could not have waited until the following day? Between 17.00 h and 09.00 h, could it not be replaced by telephone advice? A single consultant (working a reasonable shift of say 8 h) could provide advice to junior doctors, and others, for a large catchment of several million people, with a local consultant still available to review patients between 09.00 h and 17.00 h on weekends and public holidays.

There are two strong arguments for making such a change. First, the effort and expenditure invested by the National Health Service in ensuring the physical presence of a consultant psychiatrist at all times could be better spent on other service developments. Second, recruitment and retention are major challenges for the psychiatric profession (Storer, 2002) and we compete with other specialties for