Medical training in Australia

DEAR SIRS

I read with interest Dr Balmer's article on the benefits of experience in a general practice attachment during his psychiatry training. (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, July 1993, **17**, 422–423). Having recently returned from Australia, where I completed the examination for FRANZCP, I would like to comment on my experience of medical training within the Australian system.

The clinical component of the examination for membership for the RANZCP includes a medical viva. This is designed to test a candidates knowledge of general medicine as applied to psychiatry. Currently, candidates interview and examine one medical patient and are subsequently examined by both a physician and a psychiatrist.

In order to prepare for this somewhat daunting task most candidates organise some general medical tuition. I attended a weekly out-patient clinic with a physician who conducted a general medical clinic and had an interest in teaching. During this time I was updated on current medical thinking and treatments, refreshed my clinical skills and was coached in exam technique. Through contact with medical registrars in training I was also directed toward ward based patients who illustrated various clinical signs and symptoms.

This exchange of ideas in teaching was not, I feel, entirely one way. As an experienced psychiatrist I was also able to comment on psychiatric aspects of patients' presentations, where appropriate, without having any formal clinical involvement.

I was struck by a number of benefits at the re-exposure to hospital medicine after, in my case, nearly ten years in psychiatry positions. First, it serves as an educational role in both acquiring new knowledge (particularly regarding ever changing drug therapies) and in maintaining previously learned clinical skills. Second, it allows psychiatrists an awareness of the facilities available and the pressures under which our medical colleagues work. Third, it facilitates more direct communication between psychiatrists and physicians. These factors may be particularly beneficial to clinicians working away from their DGH.

As psychiatrists we have to find a balance between pursuing our area of specialty and keeping abreast of development in medical management of our patients. Opportunities for medical exposure clearly occur in liaison positions. Continuing education may also be facilitated by regular links with our medical colleagues through out-patient clinics, particularly for those psychiatrists or trainees isolated from their DGH. In my experience this is of benefit to all parties.

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Who acts as the consultant's nominated deputy?

DEAR SIRS

I have followed the debate on the subject of the consultant's nominated deputy with interest (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, 1992, **16**, 756–761). Cooper and Harper (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, July 1993, **17**, 439–440) question who should act as the consultant's deputy when Section 5(2) is employed by non-psychiatrists. An answer can be found in paragraph 8.14 of the Mental Health Act Code of Practice (1990), in which it is recommended that "only registered medical practitioners who are consultant psychiatrists should nominate deputies". This means that when a Section 5(2) is applied on a medical or surgical ward, it is the responsibility and duty of the consultant physician or surgeon to complete the relevant forms.

It seems unlikely that our medical and surgical colleagues are aware of their responsibilities under the Mental Health Act. Here in Northallerton, we have embarked upon an exercise to bring these to their attention, and to offer appropriate instruction.

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Reference

HMSO (1990) *Code of Practice, Laid before Parliament pursuant to Section 118(4) of the Mental Health Act 1983.*

Seating patients during consultations

DEAR SIRS

A good interview is important to establish rapport and gather all requisite information sensitively. It is generally considered that, in a conventional interview room, the patient should be seated at an angle to the doctor four or five feet away at the side of, rather than across the desk. This is said to facilitate eye contact and reduce the barrier between doctor and patient (Martin *et al*, 1985; Myerscough, 1989).

We wish to report a study on the preference of patients for where they sit in a general psychiatry out-patient clinic. For a five week period the consulting rooms were rearranged. The psychiatrist sat behind a desk and two identical chairs were placed equidistant from him or her and the door. One was across the desk and the other next to it. All patients were invited in as usual but given no indication of where they should sit. We recorded where they sat and whether it was their first attendance. The patients had a variety of diagnoses and were aged 16 or over. We did not examine the relationship between diagnosis and seating.