
Editorial: APT and standards for clinical practice

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The quality of training provided for those entering the medical speciality of psychiatry in the UK and Ireland has steadily improved over the last two or three decades so that practitioners are now better informed and more skilled in carrying out their clinical work. However, until the last few years we had assumed that those already established in clinical practice, consultant psychiatrists, would fend for themselves and keep themselves up to date academically and professionally. Unfortunately this has not always been so and in all specialities of medicine in Britain there has been considerable attention to developing comprehensive programmes of Continuing Medical Education. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has called this 'Continuing Professional Development' (CPD) for two reasons: development includes more than the rather narrower aspect of acquiring medical techniques; and we also recognise the multi-disciplinary nature of the practice of psychiatry and so education involving the whole multi-disciplinary team often has benefits.

The College launched its programme of CPD in the last few years and I had the privilege to become Director of CPD in 1993. We published our report concerning our intentions and directions in 1994 (Council Report 33) and initiated the certification of psychiatrists, both consultants and those in other non-training grades, in January 1995. Certification is voluntary but is seen to convey benefits to psychiatrists themselves, to their employers in NHS Trusts and other organisations, to those who purchase services such as Health Authorities and the Department of Health, and of course to patients and the general public.

The College has been providing programmes of training both in conferences and meetings and also in workshops, courses and seminars for many years. We intend to increase the range of these activities and to make them specifically directed to the needs of different groups of psychiatrists. From January 1996 we are validating courses and meetings for appropriateness in achieving CPD goals. The joint meeting of the Association of

European Psychiatrists and the Royal College of Psychiatrists in July 1996 will be validated for CPD units for certificated psychiatrists.

Advances in Psychiatric Treatment is a cornerstone of the College's programme in developing CPD. It is specifically directed to the needs of consultants and others in CPD and this aim is always borne in mind when selecting topics and authors.

At the moment most articles are commissioned, however, some have been sent to the Editor unsolicited and we welcome this, although we do not guarantee to publish! We also welcome correspondence and hope that the debate engendered will be vigorous and informative.

We try very hard to maintain a balance between articles on physical aspects of treatment, psychotherapy and psychological aspects of treatment, management issues and the running of psychiatric services, and the many different sub-specialities of psychiatry. We also see the training of junior doctors and the management and welfare of all members of the multidisciplinary team as essential aspects of the work of the consultant psychiatrist; hence an article in this issue on training matters and also on the workings of the treatment team. An occasional item will be a brief case history with comment on management by experts contributing from different disciplines or treatment perspectives.

APT is developing and always seeking to meet the needs of its readership in CPD. It has so far largely been directed at those practising psychiatry in the UK and Ireland. However, we would like to recommend it as an English language contribution to the continuing professional development of psychiatrists more widely and especially in continental Europe. We would gladly concern ourselves with the psychiatric interests of our colleagues from other European nations and this will be reflected in future both in the topics covered and their authorship. The journal aims to be practical, evidence-based, well informed, interesting and readable. It is aimed at the working clinician and we are prepared to modify it as necessary to achieve its aim.