



columns

practitioners to adhere to it, people with memory problems would be deterred from approaching general practitioners or attending clinics, to their detriment and to the greater public risk.

KOLOWSKI, S. J. & ROSSITER, J. (2000) Driving in Somerset. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **24**, 304–306.

DRIVER AND VEHICLE LICENSING AGENCY (1999) *At a Glance Guide to the Current Standards of Fitness to Drive*. Swansea Drivers Medical Unit: DVLA.

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## Christmas Appeal

Sir: Now the season of Christmas is almost upon us and all without regard to race or creed look forward to one of the

happiest times of the year – not so for all. Those of us connected with the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund (RMBF) know only too well the sadness that follows unexpected tragedy within our profession. The hardship that may follow seems magnified at this time of year; all the more poignant when young children are involved.

The generosity of the readers of *BJP* and *PB* last Christmas helped the Fund to distribute additional seasonal support of £75 000 to help bring some semblance of happiness and dignity to those doctors less fortunate than themselves, and particularly their bereaved families. Each year our general grants total well over £800 000.

The Fund always seeks to give this extra help at Christmas with gifts to the children involved. May I therefore ask for your support again this Christmas. The

RMBF is very much your fund and for this reason I am taking this opportunity to write to all doctors. I do hope that this Christmas you will decide to contribute to our appeal. Our ability to help depends upon your generosity. To those of you who are already members and all the other doctors who have helped during the year – thank you. On this occasion I particularly thank those of you who send us a cheque for the first time this Christmas.

Contributions marked 'Christmas Appeal' may be sent to the Chief Executive Officer of the RMBF at 24 King's Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 8QN, or to the Treasurer of your local guild of this Fund. Thank you.

**Rodney Sweetnam** President of The Royal Medical Benevolent Fund, 24 King's Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 8GN

# the college

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## Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting

July 2000

The Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting of the College was held at the International Conference Centre, Edinburgh, on 3–7 July 2000.

The Business Meeting of the Royal College of Psychiatrists was held on Wednesday 5 July and was chaired by the President, Professor John Cox. It was attended by 180 members of the College. The minutes of the previous meeting held in Birmingham on 1 July 1999 were approved and signed.

The report of the President was received. The report of the Registrar was received. The report of the Treasurer and a summarised version of the annual accounts for 1999 were received and approved. The re-appointment of the auditors was approved. The new fees and subscription rates from 1 January 2001 were approved. The report of the Dean was received. The report of the Editor was received. The report of the Librarian was received.

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## President's report

Professor Cox reported that the past year had been a particularly busy one for the College as well as being extremely productive. So many activities had taken place, both behind the scenes – with members quietly (and with great commitment) getting on with their work within divisional speciality and educational

domains – and those that had been very public indeed, such as the introduction of the National Service Framework in England and the General Medical Council's (GMC) proposals on revalidation. It had also been necessary to sort out what was 'spin' and what could therefore become 'unspun'!

Yet mental health had remained a high priority of Government, both north and south of the border, and the President believed that the College had developed structures whereby it could now influence politicians looking for votes more directly both through our formalised lobbying at regional and national level and via more informal 'hotlines' to ministers and civil servants in the Department of Health and, more recently, the Home Office.

The appointment of Professor Appleby as the National Director for Mental Health Services – who had the ear of Ministers – was potentially a most significant and welcome development. Council had wisely agreed to his being invited to become an observer at College Council meetings. The likelihood of consistent and informed advice getting through to where it really mattered was therefore increased.

The President believed that the recent work of the College, to an extent symbolised by the high profile media-attended conference in Edinburgh, had also been facilitated by the changes to College structures and functions initiated during the presidencies of Dame Fiona Caldicott

and Dr Robert Kendell, and which were now more fully operational. The new committee structures remained inherently democratic and had, with some fine tuning, enabled the College to tap the resources of the membership and to respond more swiftly to the rapidly changing, very public, world in which the College's work was increasingly carried out. Professor Cox referred specifically to the strengthening of the Executive Committee by the inclusion of all chairmen of faculties and, more recently, the Chairmen of the Irish, Welsh and Scottish Divisions. The establishment of a Single Training Committee, and the greater influence through the Education Committee and Court of Electors regarding the direction and content of the MRCPsych examinations were further positive developments.

The international work of the College was being reviewed, and the recommendations of Dr Kendell's Working Party on this topic were awaited with great interest. Professor Cox hoped that the College would increasingly recognise its international responsibilities, and find ways of making more appropriate links with other psychiatric societies through the World Psychiatric Association, whereby it – and they – could be strengthened.

The President believed that the strength and influence of the College on the wider medical scene remained very