

capacity. The fact that the Commission has a statutory duty to investigate complaints by patients dissatisfied with the way in which their complaints had been primarily investigated by hospital management means that the Commission will inevitably be involved in assessing its own procedures. Moreover, none of the four members of the Committee Inquiry had been a visiting Commissioner to Ashworth.

- (b) No mention is made in the Working Group Report that the Inquiry Report was in fact highly critical of the Commission and made recommendations which the Commission has responded to with a new style of visiting Special Hospitals and a review of its Complaints Policy.

At page 21, paragraph 4(v), under *Corporate Responsibility: The Role of Other Bodies* the Working Group report states that "the College believes that it was unfortunate that the members of the Inquiry included three who had

responsible roles within the Mental Health Act Commission, a body which, with others, had failed to remedy deficiencies in the care of patients at Ashworth Hospital. The College should recommend to the Department of Health that future Committees of Inquiry, which are statutorily appointed to address serious complaints concerning standards of psychiatric care, should include representation from bodies who are independent of the procedures that are in place for assessing such care".

The Commission has no remit to remedy the deficiencies in the care of patients at Ashworth Hospital. The Commission is a watchdog body, not a manager or inspector, with powers to give directions to management. The most that could be said is that the Commission failed to draw the attention of the Secretary of State and the public to the ill-treatment of Ashworth patients, and this was said by the Committee of Inquiry in its Report.

SIR LOUIS BLOM-COOPER, *Chairman, Mental Health Act Commission*

Senior house officer, staff grade, and registrar manpower quotas in England and Wales

Executive Letter EL(94)17 was issued by the NHS Management Executive on 18 February 1994. Its title was 'The New Deal: plan for action'. Perhaps because of this title it appears that many psychiatrists have been unaware of its recommendations on senior house officer and staff grade posts. Reports reaching the College indicate that it has been implemented in various ways in different regions. However, psychiatrists should be aware that there is now, in most regions, more flexibility in the possibility of creating new SHO posts than previously so that, provided local funding can be obtained, it may be possible to discuss with the Regional Manpower Committee or the Postgraduate Dean the

creation of new posts providing they have educational approval, fulfil a service need and would not distort the manpower structure in the region.

As far as registrars are concerned, the College has been able to demonstrate to JPAC that the continuing reduction in quotas of registrars in line with *Achieving a Balance* will result in insufficient trainees to fill predicted consultant vacancies. In view of this the registrar numbers in the psychiatric specialties have been frozen at the current level.

DAVID STORER, *Chairman, Manpower Committee, Royal College of Psychiatrists*