

so that doctors "have immediate verification of patient eligibility and coverage at the time of service". Self help audiotapes such as 'Magnify Your Self-consciousness' are now available, but a must for the

paranoid therapist was the new dual speed 'Sound Screen', a device which "reduces the risk of others hearing private therapy sessions". In the NHS, we have to be content with just closing the door.

Psychiatric Bulletin (1991), 15, 573

International Symposium on Eating Disorders*

DAVID REISS, Registrar in Psychiatry, St Ann's Hospital, London N15 3TH

Wednesday, 17 April 1991, advertised on the Paris Metro as 'la première journée de la minceur' was, by an appropriate coincidence, also the morning Professor Philippe Jeammet welcomed over 800 participants from 34 countries to this bilingual conference at which 298 papers and posters were presented. In 1859 Louis Marcé, described by Dr Joseph Silverman as the "forgotten man of anorexia nervosa", wrote the first description of the syndrome. Today anorexia nervosa is common, expensive and life threatening, responsible for an estimated 200 British deaths every year.

Professor Arthur Crisp proposed that anorexia nervosa has not changed much over the centuries and, as it is not sensitive to fashion or male preference for a particular female body shape, was probably as common in Rubens' day. Summarising data collected in London from 1960–1990, he demonstrated that such features as age of onset, overall dietary pattern and sex incidence, have remained stable over time. The historian Rudolph Bell, whose study of 261 Italian female saints from the 13th century onwards has illuminated many parallels between religious fasting ('holy anorexia') and anorexia nervosa, argued that it is our understanding of eating attitudes and behaviour which varies with the historical and cultural setting.

Despite the ever increasing amount of clinical data on eating disorders, we still know little about their aetiology. A marked contrast was evident between the psychoanalytic approach of the French and the Anglo-American multifactorial view. Professor Paul Garfinkel strongly implicated genetic factors in

anorexia nervosa quoting a monozygotic twin concordance rate five times that of dizygotic twins. He went on to outline a model in which individual, family and cultural risk factors result in a diet to enhance self worth and personal control. In the end, however, the individual loses control of the diet and the illness becomes self-perpetuating. According to Professor Garfinkel, important maintaining factors are the starvation syndrome itself, the fact that the purging behaviour becomes important in the regulation of unpleasant affect, and changes in the family and social relationships.

Treatment of the eating disorders continues to be controversial. Professor Gerald Russell illustrated results from the Maudsley indicating that family therapy is not only an effective treatment for those anorectics aged 18 or younger with less than three years of illness, but that benefits are still evident at five year follow-up. Whereas drugs have not been proven to be significantly effective in anorexia nervosa, antidepressants, although they 'cure' very few, may be helpful in bulimia nervosa. Professor James Mitchell reported that in his bulimic patients group therapy with a cognitive behavioural therapy approach was more effective than drug treatment alone. He went on to promote the value of early interruption of symptoms and a period of intense (more than weekly) treatment. Further research is still important for in all studies many patients do not improve.

The conference concluded with Professor Peter Slade's recommendation of a method of prevention involving early recognition and intervention with the at-risk individual. The plan though laudable was ambitious, requiring that over one in 200 of the population be identified and monitored for dieting behaviour. Eating disorders are clearly going to be with us for the foreseeable future.

*Conference of The International Society for Adolescent Psychiatry with The World Psychiatric Association Section of Eating Disorders held on 17, 18 and 19 April 1991 at the Palais des Congrès, Paris.