the Medical Assistant or Similar Non-Consultant Career Grade in Psychiatry raises some important points in relation to women in psychiatry, and analysis of the replies should be interpreted with caution.

The consultant questionnaire provided an opportunity for personal comment and included a detailed section on the possible reasons for a non-consultant career appointment. In contrast, non-consultants received a questionnaire without provision for personal comment, and offering no information about possible alternative career structures. No details of age, qualifications, marital status or geographical mobility were requested.

It is not clear from the analysis that there are differences in the career plans of male and female psychiatrists in training; the questionnaire to non-consultants did not enquire about career plans. It is apparent from the analysis that there are fundamental differences in the way that men and women view their career prospects in psychiatry. Such differences are less obvious in the senior registrar grade, when senior trainees may be assumed to have formed a fairly clear idea of what their chosen career has to offer, and also of the demands that it will make on them. Dr. Peter Brook, writing on 'Women in Psychiatry' (*News and Notes*, June 1974) clearly states that women doctors are limited, both temporally and geographically, in the jobs for which they can apply. It may well be that the form of the questionnaire on a non-consultant career grade biassed the answers, and certainly many women who are well qualified, but geographically limited occupy medical assistant posts at the present time, not in preference to a consultant post but because no consultant post is available in that area.

The response to the questionnaire suggests that there is support from all grades of psychiatrists for the maintenance of a non-consultant career grade for work and persons suited to such posts. Women appear more likely than men to consider such posts, but insufficient detail is available to draw firm conclusions from the replies. It seems likely from recent surveys of women trainees (Black, 1974, Correspondence *News and Notes*, October 1974; Ashurst, 1974) that aspirations are changing and that the majority of women take their training seriously and have expectations of an eventual consultant career in spite of geographical limitations and the demands of family life. There is already much pressure from other branches of the medical profession for a more flexible consultant contract. There is little doubt that such a contract would be eminently suitable for women with dependents, and psychiatry would surely benefit.

It would seem that the College should support the retention of a non-consultant career grade in situations where it is appropriate both to the work carried out and to the candidate for the post. However, medical assistants should not be 'consultants on the cheap', nor should the skills of suitably qualified and experienced psychiatrists by under-utilized when the specialty faces a manpower problem. Flexibility is a fitting virtue for psychiatrists, and the College should formulate a policy with these considerations in mind.

PAMELA ASHURST,
Senior Registrar.

Glenside Hospital,
Blackberry Hill,
Stapleton, Bristol BS16 1DD.

WOMEN IN PSYCHIATRY

DEAR SIR,

I was interested in Dr. Dorothy Black's letter on this subject and dismayed by her final sentence. I do not think that psychiatry is unwelcoming to women. Thirty years experience has given me the impression that women excel in psychiatry. I think it is a little unfair to call the specialty rigid. The difficulty is surely in accommodating part-timers, regardless of sex. The psychiatric patient relates to one person, and even when there is a whole-time team there are difficulties which do not arise in subjects such as general medicine and general surgery. To be somewhat facetious, one might make the counter-charge that it is the women who are somewhat rigid in demanding, in such a high proportion of cases, part-time appointments. More seriously, the constraints result from the patients' needs and not from the desires of either women, psychiatrists, or employing authorities. If this is forgotten we may make poor decisions.

E. A. BURKITT.

Memorial Hospital,
Darlington.