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THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

On 19 December, the College moved to its new address, 17 Belgrave Square. The event marked an historical turning point in its development. With its 131 years of uninterrupted life, under different names, it is the oldest medical society of its kind in the world. I have already outlined our tentative plans for the use of the new building. I should like to add that when the Mews House reverts to us at the termination of its lease in 13 years' time or perhaps at an earlier date additional possibilities will arise; it may, for example, prove possible to offer a limited amount of residential accommodation for those affiliated to the College who need to stay overnight in London.

Only one year ago, in December 1973, the College was in a precarious situation. Having failed, after a long succession of enquiries, surveys and bids, to purchase any property, we stood in danger of losing the only funds we had acquired. The Trust in question gave notice of its intention to withdraw within one month the sum of £100,000 it had tentatively offered unless we had by then succeeded in purchasing a property that could provide an acceptable home for the College. However, thanks to the prompt and decisive efforts of the sponsors and to some strokes of good fortune we were able to snatch success from what looked like a hopeless predicament.

The last year has also seen other achievements and progress that give cause for pride and satisfaction. The Accreditation exercise is well under way and has already made a significant impression on the standards of post-graduate education in many parts of the country. Regional and Area Health Authorities have proved responsive to the detailed, fair and

objective reports issued by the panels, and they have moved briskly to implement recommendations as far as they were able. A sense of life and movement has been engendered in the field of post-graduate psychiatric endeavour.

The reports of the panels have taken a forward look towards comprehensive programmes of training requiring experience in a range of specialties. There have in consequence been concomitant benefits in the form of greater co-operation in certain areas between different arms of the mental health services to fulfil educational needs. This has contributed something to integration and enhanced the morale of staff; and these developments have probably helped to improve the quality of the care given to patients.

But at a time of financial stringency such as this the effort to advance the aims and purposes of the College

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is uphill all the way. One purpose in writing this letter is to enlist your help and support. We are at a serious disadvantage in relation to other learned bodies within medicine. Some have centuries of experience and tradition behind them, are firmly established in our culture and have no stigma to contend with. In the acquisition of resources with which to carry out their work they have a start of some centuries. Even a decade ago it was possible for Royal Colleges to acquire sites and buildings under favourable terms from the Crown Commissioners among other landlords in London. Unhappily this was no longer the case by the time we were given our Charter. In consequence, to complete the purchase of 17 Belgrave Square we will have to clear a debt of half-a-million pounds.

Sums of this order are beyond the capacity of any body of professional men to provide; and I am confident that despite the critical economic situation our sponsors will fulfil the pledges they have made to us. There are, however, certain immediate forms of assistance which those associated with the College can provide. I hope that you will respond to the appeal I wish to make in a positive, understanding and generous manner.

The College's new home requires to be redecorated, equipped and furnished. For all this we have at present virtually no resources. We have been fortunate in our friends and benefactors. One lady has devoted much time and effort to helping with the redecoration of the new building. Without her dedicated voluntary help this could have been a costly exercise. We have also been offered on extended loan a splendid Epstein bust. This makes a good beginning to the long task of creating within the home of the College an atmosphere of beauty and distinction. Any gifts in the form of other works of art or furniture of appropriate character you may be able to offer will be very welcome.

Further, as you will appreciate, our efforts to clear the College of debt are making very slow headway in the present economic climate. If anyone knows of individuals or organizations who might be interested in helping the College, I hope they will put them in touch with our Appeals Committee.

I should like to make one other request. Our subscription is the lowest of any Royal College. One College has recently been compelled to raise its annual subscription to Fellows to £60 per annum. Yet our resources bear no comparison with theirs, and our financial situation is much more precarious. During the past three years Fellows have voluntarily added a sum of £15 to their annual subscription and Members have added £12. I should like to appeal to Fellows and Members to maintain this voluntary subscription by an additional cheque, as the amount is not covered by the banker's order in force for 1975. In other words, the total subscription from Fellows would be £35 and from Members £27. (Overseas Fellows—£32; Overseas Members—£24.) Some may be unable to do this for reasons of hardship. But I hope that all who can will give the College the help we need.

In responding to my appeal, you will be contributing to the advancement of the College during its early formative years.

Yours sincerely,

MARTIN ROTH.

December 1974.

Note by the Hon. Treasurer

For the information of Fellows and Members paying their subscription by banker's order, it should be pointed out that the voluntary element of the subscription operated for a period of only two years which expired on 31 December 1974. It will therefore be necessary for a separate cheque to be sent to the Treasurer of the College for the voluntary part.