

# BRITISH JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY NEWS AND NOTES

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## THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

### SIR MARTIN'S VALEDICTORY LETTER

I should like to thank you for the great honour you bestowed upon me in electing me your President nearly four years ago. I can think of no greater privilege than that of being chosen by one's peers for such an office. I have tried to the best of my ability to prove worthy of your confidence.

I should like to express my gratitude to the Officers of the College for their loyal, energetic and unfailing support. Under our present Charter and Bye-laws a very great burden of work falls upon a small group of people. We are fortunate indeed to have been served by men and women of quality and dedication who have always placed the claims of the College first on their list of professional priorities and have not spared their efforts. I should like also to thank the administrative and clerical staff who have often had to contend with a heavy load of work, dislocation, staff shortages, removals and long journeys in difficult circumstances.

I believe we can look back on these last four years with some sense of achievement and satisfaction. The Approval exercise of the Court of Electors is in full swing and has already covered about half the psychiatric centres in the country. Those in a position to judge consider it to be a highly successful venture. The reports submitted by visiting teams have been candid and realistic but fair and constructive. Where criticisms have been made they have received serious and responsible consideration. Health Authorities have in most cases taken note of the recommendations and in many cases a prompt practical response has been elicited. The Department of Health has taken great interest in the exercise and I know that those of its representatives who sit as observers on some of our Committees are impressed with its potentialities. The Central Councils have been kept informed of our progress and have given support and encouragement.

## Contents

### The Royal College of Psychiatrists:

Sir Martin's Valedictory Letter

The Presidential Election

Election of Honorary Fellows and Fellows

The Specialist Sections

Political Dissenters

The College Appeal: The Lord Mayor of  
London's Reception; by H. R. Rollin

1

3

4

4

5

6

Public Policy Committee: Memorandum on  
the Operation of Social Services  
in Relation to Psychiatry after  
Reorganization

Education Committee: Overseas Trainees'  
Sub-Committee

Midland Division

The Health of the Homeless; by R. G. Priest  
Reports and Pamphlets:

The Role of Nursing in Psychiatric and  
Mental Health Care

MRC Developmental Neurobiology Unit

Correspondence

Forthcoming Events

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

13

The Joint Committee on Higher Psychiatric Training has got off to a very good start and issued and published its first report, and its Specialist Advisory Sub-Committees are already planning their visits of inspection for recognition of posts. The developments have significant implications for any future arrangements made to maintain acceptable standards in post-graduate education in psychiatry among other specialties.

To refer briefly to some other developments, the dialogue we began three years ago with the Department of Health continues. In addition to the large open meetings in which representatives from different parts of the country have been involved there have been informal discussions between the Officers of the College and some of its Committees and representatives of the Department. These have been frank, cordial and of practical value. The Divisional meetings I have attended have been well supported and most of the Divisions have shown enterprise and energy in the development of their activities. Their Secretaries are meeting to try to define more clearly the role and purposes of the Regional Divisions, to secure better coordination with the activities of the College as a whole and to improve communication with Headquarters in London.

We are now one of the constituent members of the recently established Conference of Royal Colleges and Faculties in England and Wales. The need for such an organization has been felt for a considerable time. Its influence could prove of great importance for the future of British medicine.

Finally we have established ourselves in our new home and headquarters at 17 Belgrave Square and are slowly expanding our activities there. At some time in the future the full story of the impediments, setbacks and disappointments that preceded the acquisition of our new home will be placed on record. In this letter I shall confine myself to one aspect that calls for explanation. The choice of the Belgrave Square house was wholly fortuitous. It was decided by circumstances beyond our control which compelled us to take immediate action. The facts are that towards the end of 1973 we were informed by the Foundation which had donated the sum of £100,000, which was at that time the entire wealth of the Appeal Fund, that if we failed to purchase a suitable property within four weeks their contribution would be withdrawn. With some difficulty we managed to secure a few weeks' postponement of the deadline date. Had we hesitated we should undoubtedly have forfeited all the assets we possessed. The financial freeze was soon to be upon us and the Appeal might have been grounded for an indefinite period ahead.

An intensive search brought to light 17 Belgrave Square. We possessed only a fraction of the sum needed to purchase it. It has been said that a grain of prudence is no bad ingredient in a mass of courage! The small group of people on the Appeal Committee who had to decide acted with speed, and I believe they struck the right balance. We managed to complete purchase only with the aid of a large loan guaranteed by our sponsors, and we still have a substantial debt to discharge. But in future learned bodies, whether or not they possess a Royal Charter, will find it difficult or impossible to acquire homes of their own in London.

I should like to say something about the special importance of the College's role at the present time. British psychiatry is beset with many problems. The halcyon days of expansion of Mental Health Services are for the time being ended. In a period of economic stringency it will prove more difficult to remedy and redress the neglect they have suffered over many decades. Recruitment into the field may prove more difficult. In uncertain times young men and women may choose the conventional or economically safe options within medicine. However, such estimates have to be weighed against the lesson repeatedly taught by the Approval exercise that superior and well organized educational programmes are capable of attracting people of high quality.

Some psychiatrists are daunted by the administrative tangles and complexities in which they have been enmeshed since the reorganization of the Health Service. Others have found their professional status challenged and, as in many other countries, feel uncertain about their purpose and identity within medicine and society.

The repute of British psychiatry stands high in all parts of the world. Its standards in clinical practice, its bold innovations in psychiatric services, are widely admired. The 1959 Act, defects notwithstanding, is generally regarded as the most humane and forward-looking piece of mental health legislation enacted anywhere this century. The example set here in fields such as social psychiatry, psychogeriatrics and child psychiatry have been emulated in many other countries. So have the empiricism and vigour that have characterized the best of our clinical research. However, countries with more ample means are devoting large resources to the development of psychiatric services, the establishment of new University Departments and the fostering of scientific enquiry. It will not prove easy in future to keep up with the pace being set and maintain our high standing internationally in clinical practice or research.

The possibilities for constructive work that are opening within the College could provide a powerful antidote for some of the pessimism being engendered. The great majority of practising psychiatrists are established within or affiliated to it. In this sense it is unique among organizations of its kind. It has already been successful in uniting in common efforts people of varying shades of opinion. But there will be a more compelling need than in the past for psychiatrists to pool their experience and wisdom and learn from one another. If retreat into the cultivation of individual patches of garden were to become a common response to prevailing uncertainties, British psychiatry would soon show signs of parochialism and stagnation.

There is room for everyone within the College to contribute to raising standards of postgraduate training and to resolve the problems of recruitment. As a recent conference, in which our representatives participated, made clear, we are particularly well placed for attracting women to train in psychiatry. We should seize the opportunity that presents; there

is a case for offering special part-time courses of training for women on a nationwide basis.

Through the College's Committees and the channels of communication and advice they have created the Mental Health Services can be developed even within existing constraints. Scant as resources are, the claims of psychiatry are strong and have to be made known. The potentialities of the College for developing certain kinds of research remain to be realized. John Romans has spoken of the 'excitement of curiosity . . . in the market place of the community of scholars'. At their best our meetings, large and small, have had something of this spirit. It will need much effort to infuse it into the work of the College at all levels and in every Region.

Our new President, Professor W. Linford Rees, and his Officers will need the wholehearted support of the membership in the many tasks that face them.

I am confident that the College has before it a future rich in promise and achievement.

MARTIN ROTH.

## THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

At the last meeting of Council it was agreed that the actual voting figures for the election of the President should be published. The result of the recent ballot was as follows:

	<i>Valid votes</i>
Max Hamilton	249
Thomas Forrest Main	379
Desmond Arthur Pond	406
Felix Post	135
William Linford Rees*	511
William Henry Trethowan	401
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	2,081
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\* Elected.