

CORRESPONDENCE

DEAR SIR,

May I use your columns to protest about the memorandum entitled 'The Role of Psychologists in the Health Service'. It seems extraordinary that such a document can have been written (except perhaps as a parody), far less endorsed by Council. It gives all the appearance of a defensive restrictive-practices document produced as a rearguard stand by an old-fashioned craft trade union about to be overwhelmed by modernity. However, rarely do craftsmen insult their colleagues in quite this style.

One hopes—and it seems likely—that the Trethowan Committee (to whom it is addressed) won't take it too seriously, but I believe that if, as a College, we persist with such a document we risk bringing psychiatry and our College into disrepute.

Perhaps all is not lost, as it is understood that the Child Psychiatry Section have prepared alternative proposals. These should be made available to all members of the College, for they throw the original memorandum into stark relief.

Perhaps, even at this late stage it may be possible to re-open this matter at Council level.

JOHN GUNN.

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DEAR SIR,

Clinical psychologists have long hoped that the gap that existed between their profession and the profession of psychiatry was steadily decreasing, but the publication of the College's Memorandum on the 'Role of Psychologists in the Health Service' shows that the gap is not only as wide as ever but in danger of becoming unbridgeable.

The British Psychological Society's Report of the Working Party to prepare evidence from the Trethowan Committee on the Role of Psychologists in the Health Service (Document 1, Answers to General Questionnaire) reflects the attitudes of a group of people who are curious about their environment, understanding of the nature of scientific enquiry, willing to adapt to change and seeing their role as useful members of many different types of therapeutic teams. On reading this document one felt proud to be a member of this profession. By contrast, the psychiatrists' Memorandum reflects an anxiety about a possible loss of power and authority, a resistance to change and a rejection of the methods and attitudes of scientific enquiry. This picture is not typical of the psychiatrists with whom I have worked, and I cannot believe that it is typical of the Royal College as a whole.

Most psychiatrists understand that the changes in the methods of clinical psychologists stem not from 'the growing realization of the limitations of psychological tests' but from changes in theoretical models, changes which are the essence of a healthy science. Similarly, most psychiatrists have grasped in their training in scientific method that all measurements contain some unknown and unknowable degree of error. Such psychiatrists understand why psychologists object to an IQ being quoted as a fact about a person and such psychiatrists do not quote IQs out of context.

What is the objective evidence which led to the statement that 'all too often, when in contact with schools they (clinical psychologists) are apt to adopt an academic and patronizing approach which does little to ease the natural professional jealousies existing in this field'? As it stands it is a gratuitous insult.

The conclusion of the Memorandum that no independent departments of clinical psychology should be set up can be no more than a gesture of the kind (wrongly) attributed to King Canute. Nearly two years ago I came to Lincolnshire to establish an Area Department of Clinical Psychology. We are directly responsible to the Lincoln Health Management Committee and accept work not only from psychiatrists but also from paediatricians, general practitioners, nurses, social workers and school teachers, none of whom seem to experience any difficulty in recognizing 'the presence of developing behavioural disturbance.' Our department is by no means unique in Britain.

If the question is asked, 'Why do clinical psychologists wish to be independent of psychiatrists?' this Memorandum supplies the answer. However, when one has had the pleasure and stimulation of working with psychiatrists who understand the modes of thought and operations of psychology and who are secure individuals, not feeling threatened by new ideas and practices but welcoming them, one can only feel distress at this mischievous and biased Memorandum, written more out of fear of change than out of reason, unworthy of the people whose views it purports to represent.

DOROTHY ROWE.

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DEAR SIR,

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Association of Psychiatrists in Training, I wish to express its profound dismay and that of many junior