

Medical Care in Three Psychiatric Hostels, Hampstead and Bloomsbury District Health Authority.

By Elizabeth Horder. 1990. Pp. 28. Produced by Hampstead and South Barnet GP Forum and the Hampstead Department of Community Medicine.

The mental hospital closure programme is well advanced. Thirty hospitals have been closed and 100,000 long-stay patients have been discharged. Four thousand patients have found homes in various local authority or voluntary association homes. These patients need long-term psychiatric care but they also have social needs and a higher than average level of serious medical morbidity. What is the best way in which these can be met? Elizabeth Horder has undertaken an important study to compare and assess three different models for providing long-term care to this group of patient.

The hostels she studied contained chronic schizophrenic patients staffed by trained psychiatric nurses and care assistants. Three patterns of care were identified. In one, a GP shared the care with a community psychiatrist, the former dealing with 'physical' problems, and the latter with the mental illness. In another hostel, although patients were registered with local GPs in four different practices, it was the consultant psychiatrist who dealt with all the physical and mental problems. In the third hostel two practices were involved, and residents consulted as ordinary NHS patients. Although the GPs met all the physical and medical needs, a community psychiatrist did have contact with the residents of this hostel.

Three models of care were studied. The first, shared care, worked well but there were problems in communication and in defining areas of responsibility. In the second pattern most of the care was provided by the psychiatrist. This model seemed more akin to that of an institution than to that of community care, but it was simple for the staff. The third model was closest to the normal pattern of NHS care but problems in communication and

defining areas of responsibility still persisted. Perhaps some of these problems could have been overcome had the patient held shared care records been used (Essex *et al*, 1990).

In all three models there was a considerable commitment of time from a psychiatrist. Mrs Horder questions whether this is necessary or justified when GPs are available, when the problems that these doctors will be asked to deal with are similar to those presenting every day in their practices, and when there is such a high level of support by trained hostel staff, who deal with most of the problems themselves. None of the GPs felt these patients made excessive demands nor did they find the work difficult.

A fourth model is suggested in which a GP medical officer is attached to each hostel. This would provide continuity, accessibility, familiarity and total cover. This model moves away from an institutional pattern towards a community based one.

GPs are already looking after many people with mental illness who are living independent lives in the community, but should they also take responsibility for those in residential care? If so, should extra remuneration be provided? Should GPs be able to arrange short term crisis admissions to community beds, so that admission to hospital can be avoided? The conclusions of this study are that GPs find such work interesting and valuable even though most did not have a special interest in psychiatry.

This is an important study which should be of value to all purchasers interested in selecting the most cost-effective ways to meet the long term medical needs of mentally ill patients living in hostels in the community.

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Reference

ESSEX, B., DOIG, R.R. & RENSHAW, J. (1990) Pilot study of records of shared care for people with mental illness. *British Medical Journal*, **300**, 1442-446.

Psychiatric Bulletin (1992), **16**, 126-127

Miscellany

Annette Award

The Schizophrenia Association of Great Britain offers a prize annually known as the Annette Award, for research in the field of schizophrenia. In 1992 the award will be of £500. It will be offered for an

account, not exceeding 5000 words, of an original piece of research. The aim of the award is, to encourage and reward young researchers in university departments, research units and hospitals within the United Kingdom working in the fields of psychiatry, the neuro-sciences, biology or allied disciplines.