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the teams carrying out these assessments. If the EWTD means that this can only be achieved by implementing a shift system we can see our future, and this is to be supported over and above a reduction of SHOs' night commitments. Not only is this significant for SHO training, but it is of paramount importance in defining the role of the psychiatrist in the multidisciplinary team.

Shaharyar Alikhan Staff Grade Psychiatrist, Hallam Street Hospital, West Bromwich, West Midlands WS10 1TZ

Who wants to be a specialist registrar?

From personal experience I support A. Naeem's opinion 'thinking about higher training during senior house officer (SHO) years can reap rewards' (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, November 2004, **28**, 421–424). I appreciate the importance of valid research but during SHO training I focused on developing my clinical skills and the MRCPsych examinations. As a consequence, I had no publications and was not shortlisted for specialist registrar interview.

I am currently waiting for research projects to proceed through ethics committee approval, one of the aims being to improve my shortlisting chances. However, from colleagues' experiences it seems possible that 1 h spent replying to this article may have the same desired effect.

Another concern surrounding the shortlisting process is the emphasis that seems to be placed on research and publications, while other important factors such as communication skills and clinical ability that cannot be quantified in a standardised manner on paper take a back seat. As a consequence, the system filters out too early valuable clinicians with these subjective skills but who possess less research prowess.

I do not think the quality of counter-transference you experience on looking at someone's curriculum vitae can compare to that on interview. It is these feelings you invoke in the interviewer (positive or negative) that are likely to be replicated in interactions with patients throughout your career. Perhaps it is these subjective qualities that patients will appreciate just as much as extensive research. I acknowledge the shortlisting process needs to be standardised, however, perhaps selectors could increase the numbers they shortlist.

The answer to the question: who wants to be a specialist registrar? Well, I do and I think I have a good chance once someone meets me face to face.

Nicola Philips Staff Grade, Intensive Care Unit, Queen Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital, Birmingham

Are the College 'norms' for general psychiatry dated?

The Royal College of Psychiatrists Occasional Paper 55, published in October 2002, *Model Consultant Job Description and Recommended Norms*, is the most up-to-date current document available that sets the standards recommended for the mental health services consultant workforce in general psychiatry. One would have hoped that it would command some credence in planning the consultant workforce, yet to our dismay, recently at our local planning away day between consultants and senior managers questions were asked by the senior managers about its utility. A cloud of confusion and ignorance was created and basic questions were asked about what does a consultant psychiatrist do and what should or should not be his or her role.

An interim report in August 2004, produced by the National Steering Group formed under the auspices of NHS Modernisation Agency, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and National Institute for Mental Health in England, has issued some 'Guidance on New Ways of Working for Psychiatrists in a Multi-disciplinary and Multi-agency context'. Appendix 3 of the document lists a summary of the hypothetical options discussed by the Royal College of Psychiatrists and in option 2 and option 3 there is mention of delegation and distribution of responsibility among other professional disciplines. Unfortunately, the document, gives guidance and talks of general principles only.

The general psychiatrist had already begun to disappear in the mist of functionalisation of services. Now the future feels even more uncertain. The College needs to respond rapidly with an updated version of its recommended norms for the new forms of general and specialised psychiatrists.

Thakor Mistry Consultant Psychiatrist, Hallam Street Hospital, West Bromwich, West Midlands

Impact of a nurse triage system on junior doctors' workload

We were interested in the article by Moore & Willmott (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, October 2004, **28**, 368–370) that discussed the impact of a nurse triage system on junior doctors' workload. We were involved in piloting a very similar nurse triage system at Solihull Hospital, which has a psychiatric unit based in a district general hospital.

At the time of our study the senior house officer rota was a 1:6 'on-call'

system covering the four in-patient wards, accident and emergency and general practitioner referrals, and liaison referrals within the hospital.

The nurse triage system was introduced at the beginning of February 2004. Nurse practitioners were to be the first point of contact for all referrals and ward calls in order to offer advice, screen referrals and assist the doctor with certain administrative work. During the trial a nurse practitioner was not present for every on-call shift, which therefore allowed us to evaluate the impact of a nurse practitioner on junior doctors' workload. Between 17 February and 17 May 2004 the six senior house officers recorded the time and nature of the calls they received and whether there was a nurse practitioner working with them. During this period there were 44 on-call shifts with a nurse practitioner present, 39 where there was not and 8 where it was not recorded.

The average number of calls received by the junior doctors was not significantly different with a nurse practitioner present (7.25) or without (6.76) (t -test $P=0.53$). The type of call received was recorded in four categories: referrals/advice, admissions, psychiatric ward calls and inappropriate calls (wrong mental health team/specialty etc.). The type of call received did not differ significantly depending on whether or not a nurse practitioner was on duty (t -tests, $P=0.93$, $P=0.61$, $P=0.51$, $P=0.17$, respectively). When a nurse practitioner was present, junior doctors did not receive 5 h continuous rest (the minimum required to be compliant for an 'on-call' rota under the new deal) for 34% of on-call shifts, compared with 26% when the junior doctor was working alone. There was, however, no significant difference between these results (χ^2 $P=0.10$).

Our results would appear to confirm the findings of Moore & Willmott that a nurse triage system had no significant impact on reducing junior doctors' workload. We felt though that having an experienced nurse on duty offered junior doctors support during assessments, improved multidisciplinary relationships and provided specific guidance for those who were newly appointed. However, these benefits must be balanced against the risk of trainees missing out on essential learning experiences in acute psychiatry as described in the recent letter by Dixon (*Psychiatric Bulletin* (Correspondence), November 2004, **28**, 426).

A carefully planned nurse triage system in fact could not only be a valuable part of service provision in the light of changes in junior doctors' working hours, but also lead to an overall improvement in care received by psychiatric patients out of working hours. Clearly there needs to be further evidence published to ascertain if



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a nurse triage system would be a viable working arrangement.

Sara Ormerod Senior House Officer, All Birmingham Psychiatry Rotation, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Trust, Trust Headquarters, Vincent Drive, Edgbaston B15 2TQ, **Helen Campbell** Senior House Officer, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Trust, **Gabrielle Milner** Consultant Psychiatrist, Lyndon Resource Centre, Hobs Meadow, Solihull B92 8PW

Goldberg and Huxley's model revisited

We were interested that a recent editorial in *The Lancet* used a model of referral to specialist psychiatric services from 1980 (Peen & Dakker, 2004). The original model (Goldberg & Huxley, 1980) has been refined (Goldberg, 1995). One important prediction it makes is the number of adults who will be in contact with the totality of specialist mental health services. We decided to test the relevance of this model for north-east Edinburgh in 2003.

We received 1390 new referrals from the population aged 18–64 years inclusive. (Our records were hand-searched to ensure each individual was counted only once.) This is equivalent to 2.3% of the catchment population in 1 year, or 230 people per 10 000 population (95% confidence interval 220–240). The model predicts a figure of 208 adults in contact with the totality of specialist mental health services.

We conclude that the model substantially underestimated the utilisation of specialist psychiatric services. It would take a great deal more work to calculate the variance; we would have to add to the patients newly referred, patients already

known to our own service, services for the elderly, NHS psychotherapy, and clinics for people with alcohol, drug and eating problems.

We do not know to what extent our findings can be generalised. We only hope that those who purchase general adult psychiatric services are not doing so on the basis of this model.

GOLDBERG, D. (1995) Epidemiology of mental disorders in primary care settings. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, **17**, 182–190.

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PEEN, J. & DAKKER, J. (2004) Is urbanicity an environmental risk-factor for psychiatric disorders? *The Lancet*, **363**, 2012–2013.

Treasa O'Sullivan Specialist Registrar, Royal Edinburgh Hospital, **Amanda Cotton** Senior House Officer, Royal Edinburgh Hospital, **Allan Scott** Consultant Psychiatrist, Andrew Duncan Clinic, Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Morningside Terrace, Edinburgh EH10 5HF

The NHS International Fellowship Scheme

The NHS International Fellowship Scheme (Khan, 2004) is discriminatory against UK trainees and non-consultant career grade (NCCG) psychiatrists. Those who choose to come to the UK and train for membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists should feel aggrieved.

Some of the members of our College have valuable NCCG experience. Unfortunately, European legislation does not permit any NCCG experience to be

counted towards the Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST). In contrast many from overseas can get on the specialist register without any UK experience.

Reportedly, these NHS international fellows are experienced psychiatrists with overseas qualifications. Goldberg (2004) mentions strict selection criteria but what evidence do we have of accreditation of training from countries where NHS international fellows are recruited? Does their training reflect the standards and strict time limits set for post membership training in the UK? This accreditation seems to be a flexible paper exercise. Also, we must not forget that psychiatric higher training is not about management of mental illnesses alone.

Our Royal College should not forget NCCGs, who have filled a gap in NHS psychiatry. The Postgraduate Medical Education Training Board is likely to bring a change. Our college should pre-empt this and show leadership by forward thinking and acknowledge NCCG experience of their members towards CCST.

Overseas doctors should be welcomed. However, they should undergo a period of specialist registrar training in the UK commensurate with their experience. Following this training they should be appointed as consultants in open competition against home grown trainees.

GOLDBERG, D. (2004) The NHS International Fellowship Scheme in Psychiatry. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **28**, 433–434.

KHAN, M. M. (2004) The NHS International Fellowship Scheme in Psychiatry: robbing the poor to pay the rich? *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **28**, 435–437.

Tayyeb A. Tahir Specialist Registrar in Psychiatry, Whitchurch Hospital, Cardiff CF14 7XB