

Midlands Division trainees' day, 25 May 1989

Interviews: Strategies for success

OLA JUNAID, Registrar in Child Psychiatry, Child and Family Therapy Clinic, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire; and GABRIELLE MILNER, Senior Registrar, All Saints Hospital, Birmingham

Dr R. Caplan, Clinical Tutor, County Hospital, Lincoln presented his formula for succeeding in the increasingly competitive struggle up the career ladder. In order to succeed it is necessary to plan your career from a very early stage. It is important to decide in which area of psychiatry you wish to work, which exams to take and the timing (as soon as possible), to plan and start a suitable research project and to seek advice from a wide variety of sources very early in your career.

Dr Caplan suggested a major investment of time in the careful preparation of a curriculum vitae is mandatory, as a rushed job is quickly consigned to the waste paper basket. Careful attention to detail is of vital importance. He even advised on the appropriate quality of paper that should be used (120 grammes). Referees need to be carefully chosen. The professor or clinical tutor is ideal, plus of course the consultant with whom one is working. It is essential to ask potential referees if they are prepared to provide good references. It is possible to avoid bad and/or damaging references by seeking an acceptable alternative. The purpose of a CV is not only to get shortlisted but also to steer the course of the interview towards a candidate friendly discussion rather than interrogation.

A pre-shortlisting visit is essential. Do not be put off by the standard 'visits only after shortlisting' response to your initial enquiry. A short visit is preferable, asking a few sensible questions and meeting either the professor or clinical tutor and/or the current holder of the post for which you have

applied. Longer visits may be appropriate after being shortlisted.

Having successfully negotiated the hurdles and gained an interview, Dr Caplan outlined interview technique. He demonstrated quite vividly 'the power of the suit' by showing a video recording of a short comedy sketch from a BBC television programme. A calm and relaxed mood is important. The first 30 seconds is crucial, so entry and sitting position should be practised to perfection.

In an ideal situation your CV should steer the interview towards a discussion on a novel elective you undertook earlier in your career or even on an exciting research project that has at least been accepted for publication. In addition, Dr Caplan emphasised the need to be prepared, for the unprepared interviewer, and circulated a list of 20 commonly asked questions advising practice with a friend or partner before the interview. It is possible and useful to construct your own list of possible questions. Issues of topical interest which are likely to be discussed at interview include: medical audit, Körner statistics, the Griffiths' Report, the White Paper *Working for Patients*, the multi-disciplinary concept, community care and Joint Planning.

In spite of copious notetaking there followed a lively discussion. The topics included the ideal length of a CV, the constitution of an appointments panel, the relative importance of its members, and the order in which publications should appear in curriculum vitae.