

Mental health services do not lend themselves well to medical management unless the doctor appointed can distance him or herself from the consultant role, involve other professions in the executive team and loosen his/her ties with the home hospital. Furthermore, management information on caseload activity, especially community work, is often rudimentary; the use of resources is crudely divided between professional groups. There is as yet no appropriate resource management information system geared to the needs of a community mental health catchment area service. In spite of these difficulties, and the dangers inherent in the system, it is probably one of the most effective ways of ensuring consultant commitment to service developments in mental health and controlling the budget in a clinically sensitive way.

If you are thinking of 'having a go' as a clinical director, or even if you just want to know what it might involve, this booklet will give you the framework – it won't, unfortunately, tell you *how* to do it.

ELAINE MURPHY

*Professor of Psychogeriatrics
United Medical & Dental Schools,
Guy's Hospital
London SE1 9RT*

Assuring Quality in Mental Health Services: The Quartz System.

By P. Clifford, R. Leiper, A. Lavender and S. Pilling. RDP (134/138 Borough High Street, London SE1 1LB) in association with Free Association Books (26 Freegrove Road, London N7 9RQ). 1989. Pp 88. £6.95.

On seeing the title of this book, there will be many an aged and not so aged consultant who will say to himself "I didn't get where I am today by worrying about quality", and pass quickly on. Indeed, many would sympathise with this as the word quality was never heard when it could be taken for granted that hospitals were reasonably pleasant places. Probably, the idle cockroach always has been, and always will be, a feature of hospital, but surely not tragic old men found dead in the out-patient toilets.

All branches of medicine, spurred on by the White Paper, have been looking into medical audit, and setting up committees arranging weekly meetings and searching for outcome measures. The words quality assurance come in and regularly someone asks if quality assurance is synonymous with clinical audit.

This book does give a definition of quality assurance, and explains that it is the process through which institutions think about themselves and their clients. The book does not, however, directly compare this with the definition of audit as introduced in the White Paper. Quality assurance appears to be about institutions, and audit about medical or clinical care. Nonetheless, the two are inextricably entwined in community services, as well as in more obvious in-patient settings.

The theoretical background to the system suggested was introduced by a wide review of the literature. Prominent are the writings of Raynes and Wolfensberger, the influential writers on services to the mentally handicapped on each side of the Atlantic. Another important influence is that of Charles Shaw, whose work with the King's Fund is familiar to everyone who has embarked on any form of audit.

Quartz is an acronym for quality assurance teams of professionals from different areas within a service. The system is based strongly on schedules covering various topics of review, such as external links, management practices and client services review. It does, in one part, fulfil the secret dream of every audit committee and attempts to audit management. In some ways, it is broader in its scope than most practices that come more nearly under audit, and in others more restricted as it is more tied to an institution. Quality assurance can be a restrictive "navel contemplating" exercise, in which members of institutions constantly think about themselves and their clients, but nothing comes out, despite all the hours spent. In this book, quality assurance takes on the essential ingredient of audit in that it forms a cycle, taking this idea and acknowledging it from Charles Shaw's cycle.

This is a well-written book with an important suggestion which has been tried out in practice. Institutions who take audit seriously would be advised to read it, particularly as it attempts to tackle the inter-disciplinary problems and the difficulties of measuring across a wide variety of settings.

Does it tell us how to do audit? No, it does not, nor does it take the onus away from us at all. Medical audit, examination of medical services by doctors themselves, with the aim of improving care of patients and of educating ourselves and our juniors, remains our responsibility and a priority.

ANN GATH

*Consultant in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Hilda Lewis House
The Bethlem Royal Hospital
Croydon CR0 8DR*