

The Collegiate Trainees' Committee

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The structure and function of the Collegiate Trainees' Committee

Many trainees in psychiatry have only a vague idea about what the Collegiate Trainees' Committee (CTC) is or what it does. The Royal College of Psychiatrists is unique among the medical Royal Colleges in having a CTC. It was established in 1979, although its roots go back to the previously established Association of Psychiatrists in Training, which was independent of the College.

The CTC consists of 36 elected representatives from all divisions of psychiatry in Great Britain and Ireland. Most divisions send three representatives to the CTC. At least one is an inceptor (pre-MRCPsych) and at least one is a member (post-MRCPsych) of the college. Members serve for two years, and can be re-elected for a further two years, but no-one may serve on the CTC for longer than four years.

Following the annual elections, the new CTC meets for a residential weekend meeting. This allows new members to meet, socialise and be introduced to the way in which the committee works. At this meeting, the officers of the committee (Chairman, Vice-chairman and Secretary) are elected by the committee. Members of the committee are also elected to represent the CTC on various college committees, such as CAP (Central Approval Panel) and JCHPT (Joint Committee on Higher Psychiatric Training). Indeed, all college committees have at least one CTC representative, with the exceptions of the Examination Committee and the Court of Electors.

In addition to the residential meeting, the CTC meets four times per year, usually at the College, in London. Members elected to represent the CTC on other committees are also expected to attend the meetings of those committees, and the frequency of those meetings varies from three or four per year to monthly, depending on the committee. In this way, trainees, via the CTC, can influence decisions made in College which have a direct impact on our training. CTC members of these committees are expected to contribute as actively as possible, and to bring back relevant issues to the CTC.

Working groups of the CTC are set-up from time to time to tackle particular issues of interest to trainees. They usually consist of four or five trainees, who report their findings to the CTC, which may send the report to the *Psychiatric Bulletin* for publication. CTC reports recently published in the *Bulletin* include "Management Training in Psychiatry: general professional training" (Davies, 1995) and "The Collegiate Trainees' Committee position on structured training" (Davies *et al*, 1995).

CTC meetings have an agenda which forms the basis of the meeting. A major topic for debate over the last two years has been the implementation of the Calman Report. Others have been the use of logbooks by trainees (the CTC promoted the idea that these should be trainee-owned documents), problems with the MRCPsych examinations (the CTC kept this year's exam fee increase to below the rate of inflation), and the possibility of having the MRCPsych as an exit examination at the end of higher professional training (now firmly 'off the agenda' after CTC activity).

At a local level, two CTC members sit on each Division of Psychiatry, which meet regularly to discuss issues in that division, including training issues. The CTC representatives are able to ensure that the trainees' views are heard. Each year, local CTC members organise a Trainees' Day in each division, and all trainees are encouraged to attend.

The value of the CTC

Within the College, the views of the CTC are valued and frequently sought. Most documents produced by the College have some input from the CTC, either through CTC representation on working groups, or by direct referral of the document to the CTC for its views. The College, including the CTC, is primarily involved in matters of training, in advancing the practice of psychiatry, and promoting public education and research.

Most of the other Royal Colleges do not have trainee representation throughout their committee structures. Being part of the College enables trainee representatives to be very well informed

of issues at an early stage and provides an excellent platform to advance trainees' interest. Since the Chairman of the CTC sits on the Executive and Finance Committee, and all the officers sit on Council, the trainees' viewpoint is advocated at the highest level within the College. The CTC has input into forming College policy at all levels. CTC debates are generally erudite, and the committee can be robust in the defence of trainees' interests. Since these events take place within the College, many of the successes of CTC are not generally known.

Role of the CTC in monitoring training

There are two bodies in the College that are responsible for monitoring training and maintaining standards. The Central Approval Panel (CAP) monitors General Professional Training, and the Joint Committee on Higher Psychiatric Training monitors higher professional training. A senior member of the CTC sits on JCHPT, and two members sit on the CAP. Both of these committees operate by organising official College 'visits' to inspect training schemes.

A visiting panel from JCHPT consists of an academic psychiatrist (usually a professor of psychiatry), a consultant psychiatrist and a senior member of the CTC. Thus a trainee is involved in the approval of other training schemes. The visiting team then submits a report to JCHPT which has to be approved and signed by the CTC member. The JCHPT will then act on the report as it sees fit, and the CTC member on JCHPT also has input at this stage. The training scheme may be approved for a specified number of years (usually up to 5), given approval conditional upon specified changes, or approval may be refused. The latter is a last resort, since it means that the scheme will be unable to recruit new trainees, although the training of existing trainees will still be recognised. JCHPT visits can be rather 'intense'.

CAP visits follow a similar pattern. A good account of the issues involved in the role of a trainee in a CAP visit is provided by Warrington *et al* (1996). Again, a report is submitted to CAP, and thence to the Court of Electors.

One area where the CTC has been less successful in influencing College decisions is

with respect to the membership examinations. The CTC is not represented on the Examination Committee. It may be no coincidence that many trainees have expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the examinations department over recent years. This year saw the beginning of six monthly meetings between the chief examiner, examinations officers (who administer the examinations) and the officers of the CTC. It remains to be seen if this improves communication between the CTC and the examinations department.

Benefits of being a CTC member

We all complain about aspects of our training from time to time. A CTC member can advocate his/her colleagues' views in College or more locally in the divisions. The CTC allows trainees to contribute directly to debates within the College, and to participate in working groups which address particular issues.

A trainee with a particular area of interest may join a committee for that interest. Committees exist for all faculties and sections in the College, research, ethics, psychopharmacology, public education, and many others.

Membership of the CTC provides an opportunity to develop management skills, an opportunity to see how the College works and to meet interesting people both inside and outside of the College.

I would recommend membership of the CTC to any interested trainee.

References

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