

### *President's Essay Prize*

The President's Essay Prize was offered for the first time in 1991, as part of the College's 150th Anniversary celebrations.

The Prize, value £200, will be offered for an essay of 2,000–3,000 words. The topic for 1992 is the stigma of mental illness and what should be done about it.

Applicants are expected to include a critical review of current relevant literature and on this to base some original comments and conclusions.

Entry is open to all Members of, or Associates with, the College\*, without restrictions as to age or seniority. Entrants should include a brief *curriculum vitae* and send their submissions to the President, at the College, by 31 March 1992.

Judges for the Prize will be the President, the Dean and the Chairman of the Public Policy Committee.

**\*"Members of, Associates with, the College" means that applications can be received from "registered Members and Fellows of the College" as well as the "registered Affiliates, Honorary Fellows, Correspond-**

**ing Fellows, Corresponding Associates, Inceptors, New Affiliates and New Associates".**

### *The Peter Scott Memorial Scholarship*

The Peter Scott Memorial Scholarship is awarded from funds subscribed in memory of the late Peter Scott, CBE, and is awarded biennially.

The Scholarship is intended to encourage young doctors or medical students to further their studies in the field of forensic psychiatry or delinquency by enabling them to carry out research, to travel, to write, to complete a research project or to suggest any other relevant activity. The value of the Scholarship is up to £1,000, and any member of the medical profession, or medical student(s) may apply. More than one Scholarship may be awarded.

Application forms are obtainable from the Education Department at the College and should be completed and returned by 31 March 1992. The successful candidate(s) will be required to supply a subsequent report and may be asked to present a paper at a meeting of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

*Psychiatric Bulletin* (1992), 16, 56–57

## Appointment of consultant locums

Problems have arisen from the appointment to locum consultant posts of doctors who have been insufficiently trained or experienced to be appointed to a substantive consultant post. Problems arising from the appointment of locums have been compounded by legislation making it more difficult to employ doctors indefinitely in posts without apparent security of tenure. For these reasons the Court of Electors of the Royal College of Psychiatrists has considered the principles to be observed in making appointments to locum consultant posts and has made the following recommendations.

1. No doctor should be appointed to a short-term locum consultant post who has not been sufficiently trained to assume all the responsibilities of a consultant. This limits those eligible to:
  - (a) recently retired consultants
  - (b) senior registrars within a short time of completion of training for whom only three months locum consultant experience is recognised for the purposes of higher training
  - (c) fully trained senior registrars or others suitably qualified and experienced, who are not yet ready to commit themselves to a permanent consultant post, or who would never wish to do so

- (d) those trained under other comparable systems recognised by the College (e.g. overseas) but whose training has not necessarily been identical in form and content.
2. The criteria of eligibility for appointment to consultant status produced by the College are respected by employing authorities (with statutory support) and are designed to provide acceptable standards for the safety and care of patients. It would therefore be wrong to waive them for short-term appointments. A statement of these criteria is sent to all College Representatives on Advisory Appointments Committees.
3. These guidelines should apply to all locum posts. Where it is anticipated that the locum arrangement will last for more than three months a full Advisory Appointments Committee should be convened.
 

If the locum arrangement has lasted for more than three months an Advisory Appointment Committee should be convened to decide whether the arrangement should continue. Locum arrangements should not normally be continued beyond three months unless there are explicit and defined reasons.
4. No appointment should be confirmed until the local consultants or their representatives have

personally checked the applicant's references with his/her former colleagues. This should be a mandatory provision.

5. If applicants for short-term locum consultant posts do not meet the condition under (1) then either:
  - (a) no appointment should be made
  - (b) an appointment should be made at a grade appropriate to the needs of the service. If an appointment is made to a training grade, consideration should be given to the educational needs and consultant supervision of the trainee.

In no circumstances should a candidate be appointed to a post in which he/she would have to "act up" beyond his/her trained capability. This would at best be inimical to the maintenance of standards and at worst dangerous to patients. Moreover it throws an excessive burden of responsibility upon other medical staff in the same and in associated specialities.

6. It has been noted that there is a national shortage of suitably qualified psychiatrists able to carry out locum consultant work. It has been agreed therefore that the College will forward to relevant College Regional Advisers the names of those-consultant psychiatrists who have recently retired

and are willing to undertake this type of work on a short-term basis. A notice appears in the *Psychiatric Bulletin* at six-monthly intervals inviting retired members, interested in this type of work, to write to the Secretary.

7. Judgements of the Employment Appeal Tribunal have underlined the importance of careful consideration of locum tenens appointments. Evidence presented to this Tribunal has shown that some locums continue to hold their appointments for many years. On other occasions the appointment may be short and temporary. The Tribunal has pointed out that when a temporary appointment comes to an end it is the duty of the employing body to consider the position of the employee. What will then be appropriate will depend on the circumstances of each case (how long he or she has been employed, what the understanding was when the employee was engaged, what the circumstances are of the employing body and so forth). However, the irreducible minimum requirement is that the employee's position should be considered, and that he/she should not be treated upon the expiry of this short-term contract of employment as though he/she enjoyed no statutory rights at all.

*Court of Electors*  
October 1991

*Psychiatric Bulletin* (1992), 16, 57-59

## The Research Committee's Proposal for Research Tutors

The Research Committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists is proposing to set up a network of Research Tutors. This short article describes the proposals and invites colleagues who might be interested in developing such a role to contact me. The proposals have been discussed by the AOTP, Education Committee, Collegiate Trainees Committee and Council and have been endorsed by all these bodies.

Nearly all enquiries into why psychiatric trainees do not carry out research seem to finally focus on two issues. Firstly, the lack of interest in research by psychiatric trainees and secondly, the issue of lack of supervision. In our experience the first issue is not a particular problem. Not all trainees are interested in research but a great many are. Our view is that at this stage we should not necessarily be encouraging more trainees to do research but begin by encouraging and supporting those who do have ideas but whose projects seem to flounder for a multitude of reasons. It is our view that if we could develop an effective research tutors network so that trainees could see they were getting relevant advice and supervision gradually more trainees would wish to be involved in

such a process. We would not wish to make research mandatory or put further hurdles in the way of a trainee's progress.

We think now is a good time to change. Although it is difficult to know exactly how the structure of training grades will develop, it is certainly possible that the MRCPsych examination will become less intrusive in a trainee's life because as trainees spend a little longer at the registrar grade they may have a year or more post membership in which to devote a little more time to research.

Over the last four years the Research Committee has run eight residential courses on research methodology and nearly 300 trainees have attended. We are aware that they were a self selected group who were prepared to give up their time and often money to attend such a course. They came from a wide variety of backgrounds including academic posts, training schemes attached to academic departments and training schemes quite remote from an academic centre. There seemed to be no shortage of research ideas or enthusiasm for research. What there was was a definite lack of supervision. Many of the trainees had embarked on projects that were far too large or