

# Parliamentary News

(November 1981–March 1982)

During the past year the most important business of interest to psychiatrists has been the passage of the Mental Health (Amendment) Act through Parliament. Priority has been given in the *Bulletin* to reports on this legislation. Details of other matters of interest have consequently been delayed.

## Psychogeriatrics

In a written answer Mr Geoffrey Finsburg, the junior Health Minister, said that the Department of Health attached great importance to the appointment of a consultant psychiatrist with a special interest in the elderly in each health district, and it would not be satisfied until this was done. There were three such posts in the Mersey Region (with a further one being advertised) and five in the North West Region (with a further three to be advertised).

In reply to another question the Minister said that the Government endorsed the recommendation of the Joint Committee for Higher Psychiatric Training that experience in the psychiatry of old age should, where possible, in future form part of all programmes of specialist training in mental illness. The Department had recently approved seven additional senior registrar posts for training in this work on a temporary basis. On 2 December 1981 the Minister stated that surveys in this and other countries suggest that there are likely to be some half a million people aged 65 and over in England suffering from moderate or severe dementia.

## Manpower

In February 1982 the Minister of Health, then Dr Gerard Vaughan, indicated that from 30 September 1981 the following consultant posts were vacant, together with the number not advertised and the number occupied by locums.

Mental Handicap	37	(13.0 whole time equivalents (wte) occupied by locums and 13 posts not advertised).
Mental Illness	109	(37.1 wte occupied by locums, 63 not advertised).
Child & Adolescence	62	(6.3 wte occupied by locums, 45 not advertised).
Forensic Psychiatry	5	(1.0 wte occupied by locums, 5 not advertised).
Psychotherapy	7	(0.3 wte occupied by locums, 4 not advertised).

## Electroconvulsive therapy

On 25 November 1981 the Secretary of State for Wales, Mr W. Roberts, said in a written answer that, following the Royal College of Psychiatrists' report on ECT the Welsh Office had written to Area Health Authorities asking that all ECT apparatus is immediately checked for safety. The Welsh Office would have an observer on the DHSS Working Party reviewing ECT apparatus and on the College's Special Committee which will recommend appropriate

standards on the delivery of treatment. Similar replies were given by Ministers in response to other questions in November and December.

## Medical training

It was confirmed that from 16 August 1982 doctors wishing to become general practitioners will have to undertake six months' training in two of seven specified hospital specialties, of which psychiatry is one.

## Alcoholism

The Home Secretary announced that Lord Windlesham had been appointed the first Chairman of the Alcohol, Education and Research Council, and the names of fourteen members were announced, including that of Dr Norman Kreitman.

## Scotland

The Scottish Law Commission is reviewing the law relating to the appointment of curators bonis. As the result of a European Court decision a change in the law will be made to give restricted patients a periodic right of appeal.

A report on psychiatric services for children and adolescents was expected shortly which will include consideration of the position of young patients sent to Carstairs State Hospital.

Figures suggest that there are about 2,100 persons with Down's Syndrome in Scotland, a rate of about 41 per 100,000.

## Crime

In November 1981 the report of the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure (the Philips Report) was the subject of an adjournment debate in the Commons.

In January 1982 the Home Secretary, in a written answer, said that, apart from unforeseen developments, nothing would be done to initiate a formal review of the cases of Ian Brady or Myra Hindley until January 1985.

## Detained Members of Parliament

Mr Finsburg announced that the Government had agreed to consider amending the Mental Health Act so that Mr Speaker will require an Honourable Member, authorized to be detained in hospital on the grounds that he suffers from mental illness, to be visited and examined by two medical practitioners appointed by the President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, rather than the President of the Royal College of Physicians, as is required under the Mental Health Act 1959. (This amendment was subsequently accepted by the Special Standing Committee on the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill in the House of Commons.)

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