

Guidelines to Staff on Confidentiality

DEAR SIR,

While I am in agreement with much of what Dr. Z. M. Hall has stated (*Bulletin*, May 1980, p. 76), I would like to register a gentle note of protest at the implied disparagement in the 'Summary of Guidelines' of the lay staff in hospitals.

I was for nearly fifteen years a medical secretary in N.H.S. hospitals and found that the established full-time out-patients and administrative officers regarded confidentiality of prime importance at all times; any enquiries relating to the release of medical information about patients were always referred to the consultants concerned or, in their absence, to their registrars or the duty housemen. Difficulties, which in no way were a measure of failure to maintain confidentiality, only arose (a) when relief staff were engaged in holiday periods; (b) when case-notes of discharged patients began to accumulate in the secretaries' offices because registrars had very limited time to dictate summaries/reports; (c) when junior duty doctors took away case-notes to their quarters;

and (d) when the relatives of patients disseminated information obtained by them when they were in the wards or clinics.

I suggest, therefore, that the statement in the opening paragraph of the 'Summary of Guidelines' is inappropriate and might well be amended to read, 'Members of staff receiving medical records in the course of duty should return them directly to the records officer when no longer needed and should on no account hand them over, in whole or in part, to any person without a signed release order from a doctor or an authorized administrative officer.'

A release order need not be any more elaborate than the tracer card now in use in most hospital record offices, and its official introduction by virtue of the Guidelines would also discourage arrogant junior doctors from bullying secretaries and out-patients staff.

LESLIE RODERICKS
College Staff

*Royal College of Psychiatrists,
17 Belgrave Square, London.*

Forthcoming Events

The **British Association for Behavioural Psychotherapy** will hold its Annual Conference and Summer Workshops at the University of Sheffield from 9 to 12 July, 1980. Information: Rod Holland, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar, Gosport, Hants.

An international conference on 'The Future of Undergraduate Psychiatric Education' will be held on 29 September, 1980, at Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto. The Conference is sponsored by the Association of the Coordinators of Undergraduate Psychiatric Education, Canada, and will take place two days before the annual scientific meeting of the Canadian Psychiatric Association. Information: Dr George Voineskos, Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, 250 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1R8, Canada.

The beginning of the first term of the next two-year course of postgraduate activities at the **Psychiatric Postgraduate Centre, Morgannwg Hospital**, will commence on 3 October,

1980. Information: Mrs D. Pugsley, Postgraduate Administrator, Psychiatric Postgraduate Centre, Morgannwg Hospital, Bridgend, Glamorgan.

The **9th International Congress of Hypnosis and Psychosomatic Medicine** will be held at the University of Glasgow from 22 to 27 August, 1982. It will be sponsored by the University of Glasgow and the Royal Society of Medicine. Abstracts of papers for presentation should be sent to Dr David Waxman, Scientific Programme Committee, 17 Upper Wimpole Street, London W1. Information: Professor M. R. Bond, Department of Psychological Medicine, Southern General Hospital, Glasgow G51 4TF, Scotland.

A two-day **Symposium on the Individual Frame of Reference** entitled 'Personal Meanings' will be held at Guy's Hospital Medical School on 11 and 12 October, 1980. Information: Symposium Secretary, Department of Psychiatry, Guy's Hospital Medical School, London SE1 9RT.