

rehabilitation of problem drinkers had brought about very considerable financial savings.

In conclusion, the way forward is likely to consist of a multi-faceted set of policies, co-ordinated at a national level and embracing such elements as

economic control of the alcohol supply, legislation and specific policies directed at the prevention, detection and treatment of alcohol misuse in a variety of settings.

'Achieving Resource Management': a national exhibition and conference

R. N. BLOOR, Consultant Psychiatrist, Substance Abuse Unit, City General Hospital, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 6QG

This meeting, held at the New Connaught Rooms, London, on 6 April 1990, attracted over 400 delegates of a wide variety of backgrounds, including managers, clinicians and computer experts. It started with a plenary session with two main speakers from the Department of Health followed by Professor Chantler from Guy's. If, heaven forbid, I was involved with the management of the Department of Health, I would avoid at all costs allowing the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Diana Walford, to illustrate her opening address at a conference on the use of information technology and resource management with totally unreadable slides, accompanied by the explanation that the Department of Health were "trying out a new graphics package which didn't work".

The next speaker, Sheila Masters, Director of Finance of the NHS Management Board, steered clear of the graphics package but proceeded to introduce her talk on a national perspective of resource management by announcing that "there is not enough time allowed for me so I will have to get through this at a gallop!". There may have been those present, who like me, felt these two speakers inadvertently summed up the Government's approach to resource management and information technology within the NHS into three very concise nutshells, poor planning, inadequate testing and an unrealistic timescale.

The content of the first two presentations was predictable: Dr Walford assured us that what clinicians needed was patient-based credible information and resource management would provide this once it was introduced, while Sheila Masters defined the aim of resource management as providing more and better patient care through better use of resources.

It was left to Professor Chantler to look at some of the more practical aspects of the introduction of resource management and his message, that you have to get the management structures right first and then get the information systems into the management structure, was one of the key statements of the day.

For those of us not in resource management systems, this rather negated the rest of the day, which consisted of a series of one-hour presentations from eight of the major computer companies involved in information technology supply in the resource management area.

Presentations ranged from the very smooth to the extremely rough and varied considerably in their contact with reality. It was difficult at the end of the day to understand what the purpose of the conference had been. I learnt nothing new about resource management, the one-hour presentations were blatantly subjective and sales-orientated and provided little more than a sponsored elephant trap for the salesman.

The redeeming feature of the day was, however, the exhibition where, tucked away in a quiet corner away from the hype and sales pitch, were a team from Yorkshire Health Authority. They had a well-designed exhibition of what resource management is about and they provided copies of the Government information package for resource management initiatives in acute hospitals as well as a short DoH handbook on getting started on resource management. Their presentation was lucid, informative and objective and clearly outlined the major steps of consultation, education and negotiation which need to be undertaken before even thinking about talking to computer salesmen.

Resource management is clearly a fact and, as Sheila Masters pointed out, resource management is not information technology. Unfortunately this conference attempted to address both issues and failed to do either. The Yorkshire Regional Health Authority have a range of publications available—you can contact them at Jesmond House, Victoria Avenue, Harrogate, 0423-500066, for a publication order form and a review of resource management based on experience, commonsense and reality. Something which appeared sadly lacking from the other presenters at this national meeting.