

One unexpected effect for me of having ready access to a vast number of interesting abstracts has been to greatly increase, rather than reduce, the number of visits I make to the hospital library as I search for the full papers.

The impact of this service on my and our day hospital telephone bills is yet to be seen. What is certain is that this is an immensely powerful tool which is likely to contribute to great advances not only in the fields of research and education but also in direct patient care.

Interested readers can write to either Mrs Jane Rowlands or Mr William Forrester of the BMA Medline Project, BMA Library, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP.

### Acknowledgements

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## Launch of the National Register of Psychotherapists

THOMAS FAHY, Assistant Editor, *Psychiatric Bulletin*

In the imposing surroundings of the Moses Room in the House of Lords, the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) launched its first National Register of Psychotherapists on 20 May 1993. Or rather, celebrated the launch of the Register, as one of the arcane rules of the “other place” is that official launches of such documents cannot take place in the building. These regulations were brushed aside in a successful and upbeat meeting attended by representatives of the Council, politicians and members of the press.

The Register gives details of approximately 3,000 psychotherapists who are members of organisations which have been accredited by the UKCP. This publication represents the culmination of 22 years of work. Pressure for a Register of Psychotherapists was first mooted by the Foster Report in 1971 which detailed examples of the abuse of psychotherapy in the Church of Scientology. This report concluded that there should be legislation to control psychotherapy in the UK. In 1975 a Working Party on Statutory Regulation of Psychotherapists was set up and reported three years later recommending the setting up of a Psychotherapy Council which would register and enforce standards of practice. Further pressure for change came from Graham Bright MP who introduced a Bill to the House of Commons in 1981 to regulate the practice and profession of psychotherapy. Although the Bill fell at the second

reading, Mr Bright has continued to campaign for a registration system. The most significant developments in the background to the Register occurred in 1982 when the British Association for Counselling organised a symposium with the aim of furthering discussion of the matter. This led to annual meetings until 1989 when the United Kingdom Standing Conference of Psychotherapy (UKSCP) was inaugurated. In 1990 the UKSCP delegates voted to form a register. A process of tortuous negotiation between the different psychotherapy bodies finally culminated in the publication of the National Register.

Emmy Van Deurzen-Smith, Chair of the UKCP, introduced the Register. Bringing the different psychotherapy bodies together had been a complex strategic operation, rather like bringing together the world’s religions. However, the officers of the UKCP hoped that the document would help to redress public ignorance of psychotherapy and improve access to good psychotherapists. The reputation of psychotherapy had been tarnished by the ease with which any self-appointed psychotherapist could open his or her door to vulnerable members of the public. Press attention to instances of misbehaviour by psychotherapists emphasised the importance of the profession establishing clear ethical guidelines and effective disciplinary procedures. Graham Bright MP said that his initial concerns about the

licensing of psychotherapists arose from complaints from his constituents. Although his Bill had met with predictable failure in 1980, he felt that the National Register began to address the issues which he had raised in Parliament. Mr Timothy Yeo, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, said that the introduction of the Register could hardly have been more timely. Reports of sexual misconduct by therapists provided a powerful stimulus for regulation of psychotherapists. Although demands had come from some quarters for statutory regulation, he was satisfied that self regulation by the profession was the best way to deal with the complex diversity of psychotherapists who are in practice in the UK. He said that his Department was committed to continue in their supportive role, and other speakers were warmly enthusiastic about the support which had been received from Department of Health officials in establishing the Register.

Dr Michael Pokorny, Chair of the new Registration Board, said that the National Register was a standard bearer in Europe. The structure had already been copied in Ireland and Spain. He stressed the importance of a registration system as barriers between European countries devolve. The National Register lists the names of therapists who have met the training requirements of member organisations. It currently consists of 71 organisations. Each of these organisations has at least 50 members. In deciding whether to admit an organisation to the Registry, some of the prime concerns of the UKCP are the quality of training which the organisations offer their members, and the size of these organisations. The

training should be at postgraduate level, and roughly equivalent to MSc standard. Forty organisations which applied to join the Register were judged not to be up to standard. One member of the organisation has already been ejected from the Register because of concerns about standards. The Directory of Member Organisations contains an extraordinary diversity of psychotherapy groups, from the more conventional psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural groups to Buddhist-oriented psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, psychosynthesis and holistic therapies.

Initial funding for setting up the Register came from the Artemis Trust. However, continued funding comes from the constituent members of the organisation. Each organisation pays an annual fee of £650, but the plan is for these expenses to devolve to individual psychotherapists, who will pay £20 per annum. For this, they will get a Certificate of Registration.

Medical doctors have had their own registration body in the UK for more than 150 years. The development of a National Register for Psychotherapists represents an important step in the establishment of the profession, and should prove to be a significant advance in monitoring of standards, and enforcement of explicit ethical guidelines. The UKCP's Directory of Member Organisations is a very informative list of the organisations which have met the registration criteria, and provides additional information on each organisation's training requirements and contact addresses. Further information can be obtained from the UKCP, Regents College, Regents Park, London NW1 4MS (telephone 071 487 7554).

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## Guidelines for the prevention and treatment of benzodiazepine dependence\*

RICHARD PETHER, Senior Registrar, Department of Psychiatry, The Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel, London E1 1BB

The Substance Misuse Committee of the Mental Health Foundation has produced a booklet called *Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Benzodiazepine Dependence*. The problem addressed is twofold: encouraging and managing withdrawal, and preventing new cases of dependence. There is no room for complacency because although prescrip-

tions for anxiolytics have halved over the past ten years, prescriptions for hypnotics are unchanged – now twice the number for anxiolytics. The average GP can expect to have about 50 long-term benzodiazepine users on his or her list. The long-term safety of these drugs is uncertain and there are side effects, e.g. memory impairment, ataxia and falls in the elderly, and road traffic accidents.

The guidelines are aimed at primary care, where the potential for reducing prescribing is greatest and

\*The Mental Health Foundation – Press Briefing, 27 May 1993.