

suggests that a similar trend exists in the more temperate state of New South Wales, Australia.

A random survey of the records of first admissions to a large psychiatric hospital (Callan Park Hospital, Rozelle) was made. Only those who had been born in New South Wales subsequent to 1903, whose full birth date could be determined, and whose diagnosis was recorded on discharge were included, and a sample of 1,488 was obtained.

After correcting for the normal season-of-birth distribution of the general New South Wales population, a trend for schizophrenic and manic patients to show increased winter birth dates and decreased summer birth dates was apparent; this was not noted for other diagnostic groups.

Number of births per month of each diagnostic group was intercorrelated with the mean Sydney temperature for that month. The only diagnostic group to reach significance was schizophrenia ($r = -0.642$; d.f. 11; $p < 0.05$), with mania just failing to do so ($r = -0.547$; d.f. 11, $p < 0.10$).

It is emphasized that this study is a pilot one and that the numbers are insufficient to allow any definite conclusions to be reached. A study is now proceeding, examining data on all first admissions to all psychiatric hospitals in New South Wales from 1970 to 1973.

GORDON PARKER,
Lecturer in Psychiatry.

D. ASHBY, S. DELFENDAHL, P. GOODWIN,
D. HAMEIRI, S. HICKS, M. O'DONNELL, R. YAP.
Fifth Year Medical Students.

*University of New South Wales,
The Prince Henry Hospital,
Little Bay, N.S.W. 2036,
Australia.*

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

DEAR SIR,

Dr. Myre Sim in his review of *Student Counselling in Practice* (*Journal*, May 1974, 124, 502) adopts an extremely proprietorial view of the medical profession's ability to help people (in this instance, students) in emotional or psychological distress.

After three years' experience of running a Student Health Service I would beg to contradict him. It is regrettably my own experience that psychiatrists are often, by their training and the time they can offer, among those least able to provide help for those in psychological distress, unless they are psychotic.

Dr. Sim's suggestion that those psychiatrists who would argue that a medical qualification is irrelevant to the practice of psychiatry should take themselves off the Medical Register is both absurd and irrelevant. However, I would hope that his views in this respect

are idiosyncratic, because the whole tone of his review has, in my opinion, both important and unfortunate implications for the future. He seems to feel that the acquisition of a medical degree and the conferment of Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists ordains people to meddle in the minds of others, and that people who have not been so ordained automatically do not have that right. His views are not dissimilar to those of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, which was convinced that heretics should be tried by the Court of Inquisition and, if found guilty, should be burned at the stake because they were propagating the works of the devil.

To parody a famous quotation, 'Oh psychiatry, what crimes are committed in thy name'.

JOHN PAYNE.

*Student Health Service,
London School of Economics and Political Science,
Houghton Street,
Aldwych,
London, WC2A 2AE.*

DEAR SIR,

I will deal with that aspect of Dr. Payne's letter which he emphasizes, namely: 'He (Dr. Sim) seems to feel that the acquisition of a medical degree and the conferment of Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists ordains people to meddle in the minds of others, and that people who have not been so ordained automatically do not have that right'.

A medical degree is the result of a prolonged course of study and training directed to give the holder the competence to accept responsibility for his future patients. Membership of the R.C.Psych. is not 'conferred', but is again the result of a prolonged period of training and experience coupled with an examination in psychiatry in all its aspects. Such qualifications do not 'ordain people to meddle'; in fact, the reverse is the case, for the holders are only too aware of the dangers of meddling, and it is this awareness which makes them allergic to the meddling of others.

At the same time, one must recognize that psychotherapy in its many forms has attracted a host of workers who are non-medical, professional and amateurs. Unorthodox and even unqualified practitioners may practise medicine, but it is generally accepted that a sound medical training is an important if not an essential qualification. When it comes to psychiatric treatment people are less scrupulous. Diagnosis is either disregarded or dismissed as irrelevant, and treatment is regarded as the province of anybody who can spare the time. The medical practitioner is immediately dismissed as being too busy, and an army of willing helpers,