PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

Memorandum on the Operation of Social Services in Relation to Psychiatry since Reorganization

Since the implementation of many of the recommendations of the Seebohm Report much concern has been expressed in many areas about a deterioration in the social work support for the psychiatric patient, both in hospital and in the community. Following the recent publication of the *Report of the Working Party on Social Work Support for the Health Service* the Public Policy Committee undertook a survey of the regions, with the intention of forwarding recommendations to the autumn conference between the Association of Directors of Social Services, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Royal College of General Practitioners on 'Community Mental Health Services'.

Main points of Working Party Report

1. Seebohm recommendations do not imply the 'wholesale abandonment of specialism in social work practice'.
2. The importance of personal links in achieving successful professional co-operation between health care staff and staff of Social Services Departments.
3. The need for sharing the task of caring for the patient.
4. Future development of social work support for the Health Service should build on the pattern of teamwork which already exists in many areas.
5. Social workers acting as members of therapeutic teams with doctors and nurses have a professional responsibility to the team while being accountable in other aspects to the Local Authority Department.
6. Social workers should be based in hospitals which are long-term treatment units or in hospitals where there are specialties such as psychiatry and geriatrics in which 'the social component looms large'.

Regional Committees were invited to provide details of local problems and comment on the Working Party Report. The majority of replies were critical of current standards, but there were also many favourable comments.

The main criticisms include:

(a) The general deterioration in the provision of social services for the psychiatric patient.
(b) Poor communication with Social Services Departments.
(c) Delays after referral.
(d) In some areas refusals to accept further cases for community care, with consequent delays in discharge from hospital of some cases.
(e) General depersonalization of the service.
(f) Lack of specialist social workers in the mental health field, with over-emphasis on the generic approach.
(g) Dilution of services to psychiatric hospitals because of limitation of resources, and frequent extra burdens of responsibility placed upon overstretched departments from other sources.
(h) The flow of experienced field workers and hospital social workers to administrative posts on promotion.
(i) The practical implementation of the concept of 'the dual accountability' of social workers to the hospital team and the Local Authority Department.

The favourable comments include:

i. The gradual improvement in some areas in collaboration and liaison.
ii. The recent increase of mutual confidence and understanding of the problems associated with the maintenance of confidentiality of patients' records.
iii. General agreement with the recommendations of the *Report of the Working Party on Social Work Support for the Health Service.*

The Public Policy Committee suggest that the following recommendations be submitted for consideration at the autumn conference on 'Community Mental Health Services'.

1. All social workers at present working in psychiatric hospitals and units, although on the establishment of the Local Authority Department, should continue to spend most of their time in the hospital setting.
2. Any changes in social work support should facilitate the continuity of care, with emphasis on team work between psychiatrists, nurses and social workers who will be members of the therapeutic team.
3. It is preferable that individual social workers should be allocated to the various therapeutic teams.
4. As the ultimate responsibility must lie with the consultant, consideration should be given to the advisability that relevant information collected as part of hospital work should only leave the

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hospital with the consent of the consultant responsible for the patient's care.

5. It is preferable and desirable that all requests for social work support should be made to a specified social worker, rather than a Department.
6. It is also preferable that community-based social workers supervising and supporting psychiatric patients should have specialized training and experience in psychiatry.
7. It is essential that community-based social workers involved with psychiatric patients should have the opportunity of regular meetings in addition to informal contacts with the appropriate consultant, and that copies of relevant reports should be forwarded to the hospital.
8. Health Care Planning Teams should include social workers with special interest in mental health.
9. The problems relating to confidentiality are most easily solved by the establishment of local liaison committees.
10. The social worker career structure should be modified to allow experienced hospital and field social workers to be promoted without transferring to primarily administrative posts.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Overseas Trainees' Sub-Committee

An Overseas Trainees' Sub-Committee has been set up by the Education Committee with the following terms of reference:

1. To advise the College, through the Education Committee, of the needs and special problems of overseas trainees in psychiatry.
2. To examine and review the training facilities offered to overseas trainees.
3. To monitor the results of training of overseas graduates, and
4. To examine and review the employment opportunities for overseas trainees.

The membership of the new Sub-Committee (which has powers to co-opt) includes representatives of the Education Committee, the Clinical Tutors' and Manpower Sub-Committees and the Working Party of Trainees:

Dr. S. B. Mahapatra (Chairman), Dr. Surya Bhate (Secretary), Dr. I. Akhter, Dr. Peter Brook, Dr. Ashley Robin, Dr. L. Tarlo, Dr. C. P. Seager, and Professor K. Rawnsley and Dr. Thomas Bewley *ex officio*.

THOMAS BEWLEY,
Secretary, Education Committee.

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