

## *Psychology in general practice*

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A one-day symposium was organised jointly by the Manchester Regional Hospital Board and the Manchester branch of the Division of Clinical Psychology of the British Psychological Society, and was held at Clifton House, Prestwich Hospital, Manchester on 15 November, 1973.

### *Aim*

The main aim of the symposium was to help communications between general practitioners and clinical psychologists in order to discuss areas of mutual interest. The symposium was attended by a mixed audience consisting of general practitioners, clinical psychologists and a few representatives of other professions.

### *Mr J. Shaw*

Mr J. Shaw, Staff Tutor in Psychology, the Extramural Department, University of Manchester, spoke on *The relevance of psychology to illness*. He discussed the mind-body problem, in particular inter- and intrapersonal views of illness. He argued that in medicine the only breakthrough was in the intrapersonal approach, but that the mechanisms of the interpersonally induced illnesses had been harder to elucidate. He discussed the concept of the 'illness role' and also the significance of symptoms in patients who are not, in medical terms, 'really sick'.

### *Mr R. McKechnie*

Mr R. McKechnie, Clinical Psychologist, The Department of Psychological Research, Crichton Royal Hospital, Dumfries, spoke on *Psychology in general practice*. He thought that clinical psychologists, through their association with psychiatric patients had developed techniques for treating psychological disturbances such as phobias, obsessional disorders and anxiety states. Recently psychologists had turned their attention to other problems outside the psychiatric domain, which may be amenable to psychological treatment. There is now an extensive literature on the modification of smoking and eating behaviour, sexual inadequacy and marital therapy. Some attention had also been given to medical disorders such as hypertension, migraine, insomnia, and asthma, again with beneficial results. These techniques, with areas of research in general practice, which might lead to a greater psychological contribution in primary health care were outlined.

### *Dr P. Ley*

Dr. P. Ley, Senior Lecturer in Clinical Psychology and Director of the Doctor-Patient Communications Research Unit, University of Liverpool spoke on *Communication in the clinical setting*. Recent research in doctor-patient communications had identified failures of comprehension and memory as important factors. Patients often failed to understand what they were told and often forgot information given to them. Dr Ley described this research and attempts to improve doctor-patient communications. These attempts had involved experiments to assess the effects of increasing comprehension on satisfaction of patients with communication, and experiments designed to find ways of increasing the memory patients had for what had been said.

The content of forgetting can be controlled by the use of primacy effects, and stressing the importance of selected information, while the amount forgotten can be controlled by simplification, clear categorisation, and by using specific rather than general instructions.

### **Discussion**

The panel of speakers was chaired by Dr Paul Freeling, who is a member of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee of the Department of Health and Social Security, and is part-time Senior Lecturer in General Practice at King's College Hospital, London. The other invited speakers were Dr Conrad Harris, Senior Lecturer, University of Manchester Department of General Practice,

Dr J. M. Midgeley, general practitioner Colwyn Bay and Dr L. Ratoff, general practitioner, Liverpool.

Considerable agreement was expressed on the value of closer links between general practitioners and psychologists. Recognition was given to the need for prolonged contact between the two professions to identify in detail areas in which the techniques of psychologists would be of value to the general practitioner and the patient. It was important to avoid possible mutual misunderstandings based upon inadequate or inaccurate knowledge of the other's role and expertise. It was generally felt that in this context direct liaison would help communication.

*Demonstration of relevant techniques and equipment*

Psychologists from the Manchester Region and Dr J. M. Midgeley displayed some relevant techniques and equipment.

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