

Central Information Service for general practice

GENERAL medical practice is becoming more complicated all the time. Not only are general practitioners gradually moving into groups, but medical groups are progressively taking on more staff, including nursing, secretarial, and administrative.

Advances in clinical medicine, the growing quantity of psychosocial disease, preventive medicine, and increasingly sophisticated record systems all add to the complexity of a modern practice. General practitioners are fast having to learn management skills to direct the activities of what is equivalent to a small company.

As each new change becomes necessary, doctors and their staff become increasingly aware of the need for information. But where is this to be found? Although there is now an extensive literature on general practice written both from within and without general practice itself, although there are many practitioners who can now be regarded as experts in various aspects of modern medical practice, there seems to be a need for some central source of information, especially about practice premises and practice organization. Attempts have been made to meet this gap in the past, but now a new pilot study has been initiated.

Many of the main organizations concerned with general practice, notably the General Medical Services Committee, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the King's Fund, the Society of Administrators of Family Practitioner Services, the General Practice Finance Corporation, the Association of Practice Managers, the Association of Medical Secretaries, the Cardew Stanning Foundation, and Health Departments

in the UK have formed a working group to offer a pilot service.

The King's Fund and the Cardew Stanning Foundation have generously made available financial support and the Department of Health and Social Security has undertaken to provide limited funds; but money is tight and the most economical way had to be found to provide advice.

The plan is therefore to encourage general practitioners and their staff to seek information on practice premises and organization in one of two ways. Either they can ask their local family practitioner administrator or, in Scotland, their health board primary care administrator, or they can apply direct to the new Central Information Service which is being housed by the Royal College of General Practitioners at 14 Princes Gate.

In addition, the College is providing access to its Library and Practice Organization Room as part of its contribution. The service, which is run by Mrs J. Mant, who has great experience, is already handling about 100 enquiries a month, mostly from general practitioners or their staff.

This is a free service which supplies information on premises, conversions, alterations and extensions, records, appointment systems, and equipment. Its appearance is greatly to be welcomed and the sponsoring bodies can be congratulated on this new initiative. Enquiries should be addressed to: Central Information Service, 14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, London SW7 1PU. (Tel. 01-589 1252.)

General practitioners and malaria

DIAGNOSING relatively rare diseases in general practice is always a problem, yet detecting life-threatening organic disease quickly is one of the most important skills of a primary physician. Malaria is a particular problem because it is being seen increasingly in England and Wales where the number of notified cases has almost doubled between 1975 and 1976 to exceed 1,150 patients per year. The strain most commonly found is *Plasmodium vivax* and there is a

seasonal effect, probably reflecting immigration and holiday patterns.

Diagnosis

The particular problem for a general practitioner is that the presenting symptoms are similar to those of many other diseases and there is no diagnostic physical sign which can be found on examination. The pattern is