

just as in the counselling relationship there is a reduction of the power and authority of the general practitioner. Secondly, there is an increase in both the burden of responsibility and work on all concerned. Just as a counselling interview may demand more of the doctor, and certainly much more of the patient, so the consultative model recommended by Brook would increase the responsibility, the scope, and the work of the primary health care team.

Brook analyses perceptively the four main reasons why general practitioners refer patients to consultant psychiatrists and shows that only two of them are primarily to meet the needs of the patient and that the other two are basically to meet the needs of the general practitioner. By moving into the doctor's own territory, by 'holding his hand' and working with him, this system of care should make it easier for those doctors who have difficulties in coping with patients to improve their skills and should prove a peculiarly potent form of continuing medical education. The stresses on the specialist should not be underestimated and Brook referred to his own need for support, particularly during the initial months of this exciting experiment.

All great revolutions have small beginnings: all great reforms begin by the identification of a problem. The problem of referrals to specialists, and particularly the problem of referring patients by general practitioners to specialists, is intense and continuing. A growing number of general practitioners want to avoid any suggestion of rejecting their patients but may nevertheless be unable to contain them alone in their patients'

homes. The addition of an expert and specialist resource in their own practice, working in collaboration rather than in competition, changes the pressures, increases the scope, and almost certainly in the long run will lead to better care for patients.

History

Twenty-five years ago Balint, at the Tavistock Clinic, working with a group of sensitive London general practitioners, introduced a series of new ideas into general practice which have reverberated through the discipline ever since. Could it be that the wheel of history is turning again and that, once more, consultant psychiatrists from the Tavistock Clinic, working with progressive and sensitive general practitioners in London, are pioneering equally exciting changes in the generalist-specialist relationship?

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Dr Donald Irvine

THIS month the Honorary Secretary of the Council of the College, Dr Donald Irvine, retires from office after serving for seven years.

Like many of the founding members of the College, before holding high office within the College he was well grounded in medical affairs through serving on many educational committees and as chairman of his local medical committee.

He became the third Honorary Secretary of Council in his middle thirties which is certainly a record for the Royal College of General Practitioners and may well be a record for any medical Royal College this century. His term of office, in which he has served three Chairmen of Council, has been notable for the prodigious energy which he has brought to the job, his intense loyalty to the College, and his readiness to travel extensively to other faculties. His deep involvement in his practice in the mining village of Ashington, his hard work with his

local faculty, and the continuing dialogue he enjoys with vocational trainees have enabled him to speak at college meetings with unusual flair and authority.

One of his great gifts has been his ability to look into the future. Among the many important contributions he has made to general practice, two stand out: his work on the College's evidence to the Royal Commission on the NHS, and his contributions to the various stages of the central organization of vocational training. He is continuing as one of the two secretaries to the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice.

The Officers of Council, Council, and the College as a whole can be thankful that strong local roots produced in Donald Irvine an outstanding Secretary at a critical moment in the development of the College. His achievements have been remarkable and we wish him well in what must surely continue to be a most distinguished career.