

# Some suggestions for teaching about co-operation between social work and general practice

FROM THE STANDING LIAISON COMMITTEE OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS AND THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

**SUMMARY.** This discussion document emphasizes the importance of co-operation between general practitioners and social workers during their training. Sample aims and objectives suitable for trainees in both professions are listed and discussed.

### Introduction

**T**HE idea for this paper originated within the Standing Liaison Committee of the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Association of Social Workers. There are no easy solutions to those difficulties which arise when general practitioners and social workers work together. Nevertheless we thought that a positive contribution could be made by concentrating on the educational means of improving co-operation between the two professions. A paper was prepared and circulated among general practitioners and social workers who work in education and their comments helped us considerably.

In recent years much has been written on the subject of co-operation between social workers and general practitioners. Experimental attachments have been described, and teaching based on shared experience in training now occurs. But despite these advances the majority of general practitioners and social workers have not been affected.

We consider that the importance of teaching trainees in both professions is such that specific time should be set aside in the curriculum of the training programme. Ideally teaching should relate to experience and should therefore take place during the early years of professional experience. In general practice this should be in the trainee year, and in social work from the third year onward once the social worker has been accredited.

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We recognize that this might pose problems in the current framework of social work training but hope for changes in the near future.

The first part of the document is about the framework of the learning process and our reasons for concentrating on particular topics. The second part is devoted to what we think could be learned, and the third to teaching methods.

### The framework

It is widely accepted that a statement of objectives is an essential part of the educational process. These objectives may be stated at various levels ranging in complexity from the broad aim of a course of teaching to detailed aspects of day to day teaching. At this detailed level objectives should reflect the behaviour that can be expected from the student after the course, and are usually termed behavioural, or instructional. Such objectives, by virtue of their definition, provide a built-in mechanism for assessing the student.

Aspects of professional competence may best be considered under the headings of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. A sound educational programme should state objectives for all three. However, although many people consider that the change in attitudes is the most important function of an educational programme, we have chosen to concentrate mainly on knowledge. Certainly, the aim of fostering appropriate attitudes is extremely important, and indeed it is implicit in this paper, but it is one for which it is difficult to state instructional objectives. Concentration on knowledge enables a more explicit statement of objectives. Whilst attitude may be a potent determinant of the type of knowledge a student acquires, it may also be true that new knowledge produces new attitudes.

The exclusion of skills is justified because we do not think that time should be spent learning the skills of the other profession. There is, of course, overlap between

the skills of the two professions, which may be the cause of considerable friction, and in our view it is important that the student should learn about the skills that others possess. Indeed, an increase in knowledge about skills might increase the respect that each profession has for the other.

### Aims and objectives

In this section we suggest some objectives which might be suitable for an introductory course for social-work and general-practitioner trainees. They are not intended as dogmatic statements of what must be taught, but as suggestions, and may be refined, or redefined, in a number of ways. Indeed, course organizers may wish to design their own objectives, possibly with the help of their trainees.

The objectives are stated at three levels of detail, the most detailed being instructional objectives. At this level an attempt has been made to state comparable objectives for both social-work and general-practitioner trainees.

### Broad aim

To foster co-operation between social workers and general practitioners by means of a course of instruction during which trainees in both professions will acquire knowledge about the other profession. The course will contain instruction on the following three aspects of professional work:

1. The role of the modern professional worker with special reference to the historical development of this role.
2. The knowledge and skills required to fulfil this role.
3. The practical problems involved in co-operation between the professions.

#### 1. *The role of the modern professional worker*

The trainee shall be able to describe salient features of the role of the other profession in present day society. The trainee shall also be able to describe some important aspects of the historical development of this role.

#### SAMPLE OBJECTIVES

##### *Social worker*

1. To describe three aspects of medical care which are the primary concern of the general practitioner.
2. To name three important historical events in the development of the role of the general practitioner, and to describe briefly the historical

##### *General practitioner*

1. To describe three different aspects of the role of the social worker.
2. To name three branches of the social work profession before the Seebom re-organization, and to describe briefly the origins and

background to these events.

3. To describe the practical implications of the contractual relationship between the general practitioner and the NHS. Three relevant aspects of this contractual relationship should be mentioned.

development of each branch.

3. To describe the changes that have taken place in social work as the result of the Seebom re-organization. Three important changes should be mentioned.

### 2. *Knowledge and skills*

The trainee shall be able to describe in general terms the knowledge and skills required of the other profession. The trainee shall be able to describe the knowledge and skills which are peculiar to each profession, and the aspects of practice in which both professions may become involved.

#### SAMPLE OBJECTIVES

##### *Social worker*

1. To name four specific skills that the general practitioner must possess.
2. To name two Acts of Parliament that affect the general practitioner in his everyday work. Describe in each case how these Acts affect his work.
3. To name three types of problem that present to the social worker in which co-operation with the general practitioner could significantly help the client.

##### *General practitioner*

1. To name four specific skills that a social worker must possess.
2. To name two Acts of Parliament that give a social worker statutory powers to act. Describe in each case the statutory power introduced.
3. To name three types of problem that may present to the general practitioner in which co-operation with the social worker could significantly help the patient.

### 3. *The practical problems of co-operation*

The trainee shall be able to describe some of the practical problems involved in co-operation between social work and general practice. In particular the trainee shall be able to describe the differences in organization between social work and general practice.

#### SAMPLE OBJECTIVES

##### *Social worker*

1. To describe three ways in which the organiz-

##### *General practitioner*

1. To describe three ways in which the organiz-

ation of care in general practice differs from that provided in social services departments.

2. To state the average number of patients a general practitioner will expect to see during a normal working day. To state the place in which these consultations take place, the types of patients involved, and the average length of time spent over the work.
3. To list three ways in which a social worker could promote co-operation between social work and general practice.

ation of care in a department of social services differs from that provided in general practice.

2. To state the number of clients seen by a social worker during a normal working day. To describe the types of problem encountered and the average time spent with each client.
3. To list three ways in which a general practitioner could promote co-operation between general practice and social work.

routine. It should not therefore be difficult to organize joint group meetings for trainees, which can be used to explore the attitudes of the other profession. It is a good idea if the group is given a specific task during a session; for example, "to explore the different working methods of the two professions". Even if the trainees do not stick to the subject, they do have a framework for discussion.

### 3. Reading list

Finally, a short reading list is helpful and some suggestions are given below.

### Conclusion

This paper is primarily a discussion document which we hope will act as a catalyst in promoting joint education exercises between the two professions. The committee has already heard of a number of ventures in this direction, some successful, others less so. We would be delighted to hear from other people who have organized such schemes or intend to do so in the future, since this would increase our knowledge and enable us to refer people with specific problems to others who have faced similar problems.

### Further reading

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### Addendum

As stated, this is a discussion document and should not be taken to represent the policy of the Royal College of General Practitioners.

The members of the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Association of Social Workers Standing Liaison Committee were:

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### Methods of teaching and learning

Obviously there are many ways in which these objectives could be achieved ranging from the formal lecture to informal group discussion. The only firm recommendation is that some time should be included in the curriculum specifically for teaching and learning. Time should also be devoted to assessment of whether learning has taken place.

Although some topics, such as historical development, might lend themselves to a formal lecture, in general, we recommend a more participatory form of learning. Project teaching, in which a trainee, or group of trainees, investigates a particular subject in depth, would be a suitable method.

The two methods recommended as 'best buys' are: short-term attachment and interprofessional group teaching.

#### 1. Short-term attachment

A number of vocational training schemes for general practice organize regular attachments to social services departments, and in the same way social-work trainees have been placed with a general practice. Such attachments should be organized so that the trainee can see the whole range of the professional team's work. The informal nature of an attachment provides ample opportunity for a free exchange of views. Ideally such an attachment should last about a week but shorter periods are still valuable.

#### 2. Interprofessional group teaching

In training courses group learning is now almost