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General practitioners' views on geriatric day hospital care

Sir,

Concerns have been expressed that most general practitioners remain unaware of the services and facilities provided by geriatric day hospitals,¹ and research has shown that general practitioners fail to distinguish between the therapeutic functions of geriatric day hospitals and the social care provided by day centres.² It has been argued, therefore, that general practitioners need to be made more aware of the different roles of day centres and day hospitals.² Donaldson has made the point that rehabilitation should be emphasized in geriatric day hospitals in order to meet their overriding objective which is to facilitate and prolong independent living for the elderly in the community.³ We carried out a survey of general practitioners to ascertain their opinions about the relative importance of geriatric day hospital functions.

A nominal list of general practitioners provided by the Croydon family health services authority formed the study population. After two postings, 130 replies were received, giving a response rate of 79%. General practitioners were divided according to length of time in practice, and the number of practice partners. A group practice was defined as three or more partners. Approximately two-thirds of general practitioners were in a group practice, and 43% had been in practice for less than 10 years. There was no relationship between practice size and length of time in practice.

When asked to rank geriatric day hospital functions according to their relative importance, 54% of general practitioners ranked rehabilitation first (most important) and 37% ranked medical assessment first (Table 1). For social care 13% of general practitioners ranked it first, 26% second and 61% third. For nursing care 7% ranked it first, 23% second and 70% third. General practitioners who had been in practice less than 10 years ranked medical assessment

Table 1. General practitioners' views of relative importance of geriatric day hospital functions by length of time in practice.

Rank order	Percentage of GPs		All
	0-9 yrs in practice (n = 56)	10 or more yrs in practice (n = 74)	
<i>Medical assessment/treatment</i>			
1 ^a	23	48	37
2	43	31	37
3	34	21	26
<i>Functional assessment/rehabilitation</i>			
1 ^a	69	42	54
2 ^b	14	34	25
3	17	24	21

^aP<0.01. ^bP<0.05.
n = total number of respondents.

as significantly less important than those in practice for more than 10 years (Table 1). Again 69% of general practitioners in practice less than 10 years ranked rehabilitation as most important compared with 42% of those in the 10 or more years group (Table 1). Analysis by size of practice showed no significant differences in perception of the relative importance of day hospital functions.

These findings suggest a significant change over the last decade with younger general practitioners having become more aware of the value of rehabilitation and apparently more reticent about the need for medical assessment as part of geriatric day hospital care. These changes may be due to the effect of vocational training, suggesting that trainee general practitioners are being taught the rationale for geriatric day hospital care. A surprising finding was that nursing care was identified as the least important function by 70% of general practitioners. A possible explanation is that more nursing tasks are being performed by practice or community nurses and so general practitioners see little need for nursing care in a geriatric

day hospital.

Research in the 1970s showed no difference between patients attending day centres and those attending geriatric day hospitals,⁴ suggesting that general practitioners inappropriately referred patients for social care. In this survey only 13% of general practitioners ranked social care as the most important function. This may indicate that general practitioners are better able to distinguish between the services provided in day centres and geriatric day hospitals. Concern that modern general practitioners will misuse day hospitals seems to be unfounded.

The overall impression created by this survey is that general practitioners want geriatric day hospitals that have a strong therapeutic input, dominated by functional assessment and rehabilitation.

E S WILLIAMS
G CLEMENTSON

Department of Public Health Medicine
Croydon General Hospital
London Road
Croydon CR9 2RH

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Continuing education for pharmacists and general practitioners

Sir,

The relationship between general practitioners and community pharmacists has come under increasing scrutiny in the past few years. In 1981 a joint working party of the British Medical Association and the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain