

Correspondence

Psychological Medicine in General Practice—A Study of the Training Group Method

Sir,

Dr H. R. Playfair in his interesting paper in the August issue of the *Journal* considers and dismisses nine possible objections to the prolonged courses in psychotherapy for general practitioners which he studied. It is possible, however, that he overlooked other, more weighty, objections. Psychotherapy is not a specifically medical technique and it can be practised successfully by people who are not doctors. It is no innovation in general practice—Ross¹ gave a clear account of it in 1923 in a book which was revised in 1937 and has been repeatedly reprinted. It is now well recognized that psychotherapy is of only limited value in general practice; for instance, when I told a senior psychiatrist at one of the centres that Dr Playfair lists, that my partners and I had tried to treat by psychotherapy florid psychiatric disorder in patients of low intelligence and low in the social scale, he replied that we would have been better occupied playing golf.

It seems a pity that general practitioners who are prepared to spend years studying psychiatric illness in general practice should confine themselves to details of psychotherapy and the handling of the doctor-patient relationship. Psychiatry in general practice bristles with unanswered questions which these seminars might profitably tackle. They could undertake a controlled evaluation of psychotherapy as well as studying the technique; they could study and evaluate other therapeutic procedures, such as conditioning, suggestion, and the many new medicaments, and also study the use of modern methods of psychometry in general practice. The growing points in psychiatry today are to be found in the rapid advances in neuro-anatomy and physiology and the new drugs which effectively ameliorate some mental illness. We can expect that the next big advance in psychiatry in general practice will come from new methods of physical treatment.

Dr Playfair's valuable review enables one to envisage what would be the cost of extending these courses. From the figures he gives it appears that at present some 200 general practitioners throughout the country are participating in them and it seems that each doctor should attend for at least two years or preferably for four years. This gives a rate of 0.25 per cent to 0.5 per cent of existing general

practitioners being trained per year. It would require a major redeployment of manpower to train any significant proportion of general practitioners and it is fortunate that there is little evidence that this would be worth-while.

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L. M. FRANKLIN.

REFERENCE

1. Ross, T. A. (1949). *The Common Neuroses*, 2nd ed. Arnold, London.

Faith versus Fear

Sir,

In your August issue Dr Martyn writes that personality "cannot be altered and it is the prime duty of any doctor as well as a psychiatrist to recognize and appreciate this fact".

While this statement was undoubtedly true at the beginning of this century it is now, in 1962, the prime duty of all general practitioners to recognize that (as Karen Horney has stated) every neurosis is a character neurosis and that permanent success in treatment necessitates a considerable or major change in the patient's personality.

To accomplish this the general practitioner will in future require to be equipped with an understanding of modern psychodynamic theory.

Such a theory will certainly not be based strictly on Freudian thinking which with its genetic, mechanistic, and dualistic orientation is nineteenth century in its outlook.

I am at present completing a paper on psychotherapy describing major personality change in patients in general practice using Horney's psychodynamic theory which is holistic and in accord with the modern scientific concept of unitary process and is in practice an invaluable guide in psychotherapy.

Belfast

S. E. BROWNE.

An Idea in Antenatal Education in General Practice

Sir,

During her first pregnancy, my wife wished to see a confinement. This was difficult to arrange, but we did manage to see a French film in which this event occurred, but the delivery was over so