

Pressure mounts on DHSS to revoke changes in research contracts

In the past few weeks some political heavyweights have joined the scientists opposing changes in the wording of the DHSS research contract. These changes give the department the power to stop or delay publication of work it has funded.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology says in its report on priorities in medical research: "The committee stress the importance of the right to publish in maintaining academic independence and the standards of research." And in response to the government's statement that publication would be stopped only in very exceptional cases, such as when legal problems arose, the committee said it was "not entirely reassured." There is as yet, however, no case where publication of research has been blocked.

The issue has also been taken up by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals. Its chairman, Sir Mark Richmond, has written to the Secretary of State for Social Services voicing concern about "the serious curtailment of the right to publish research material" and saying that "the increased power to control and restrict the publication of publicly funded research... can be regarded as a serious restraint on academic freedom which could affect the quality and credibility of research."

The BMA has also taken up the researchers' cause, and Dr John Havard, the secretary, has written to Professor Francis O'Grady, chief scientist at the DHSS, saying that "the requirement for permission to publish will cast doubt upon the credibility of research conducted under contract to the department." Dr Havard enclosed a copy of the BMA's board of science and education's briefing paper that relates the issue to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms' declaration on free speech and UNESCO's 1974 statement on the freedom of scientific researchers to publish.

Finally, the less powerful but still important

medical sociology group of the British Sociological Association has also written to the Secretary of State condemning the changes and saying that it is "not convinced" by the informal disclaimers that publication will not be used to restrict publication. "We distinguish between the formal conditions of a contract and assurances provided in correspondence." The letter urges the government "to revoke the new form of contract and continue with the old."

There is as yet no sign that the DHSS is willing to do this, and some researchers have signed the new contracts. Others are refusing to sign.

Medic-Alert week

From 1-7 May the Medic-Alert Foundation, a charity formed in 1956, will be launching a publicity campaign. Anyone with an allergy or hidden medical condition can wear the Medic-Alert disc, either as a bracelet or necklet.

Engraved on the reverse side is a description of the person's condition and a telephone number, contactable 24 hours a day, providing fuller information about the person supplied by his or her doctor to the foundation, the doctor's name and telephone number, and the person's next of kin.

More information from the foundation at 11-13 Clifton Terrace, London N4 3JP (tel 01 263 8579).



Correction

Lister's statue

In a recent item bemoaning the state of Lister's statue (2 April, p 1008) we omitted to mention Dr R E W Oliver of Ealing who kindly originally brought it to our attention.

BMA NOTICES

Division meetings

Members proposing to attend meetings marked* are asked to notify in advance the honorary secretary concerned.

Aberystwyth—At Conrah Hotel, Saturday 30 April, 7.30 for 8 pm, dinner meeting, speaker Dr Evan James: "Old Ceredigion homes and families."* (Guests welcome.)

Barking, Havering, and Brentwood—At Academic Centre, Oldchurch Hospital, Friday 29 April, 8.30 pm, agm, and discussion of Annual Report of Council and motions to arm.

Bath District—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, Royal United Hospital, Tuesday 26 April, 8 pm, agm.

Birmingham and Solihull Divisions—At National Motorcycle Museum, Bickenhill, Wednesday 27 April, 7.30 for 8 pm, Dr Ian Picton-Robinson: "The medical problems of racing driving."* (Coffee and biscuits served.)

Burton on Trent—At Stanhope Arms Hotel, Tuesday 26 April, 7.30 for 8 pm, dinner followed by agm.*

Bury—At Postgraduate Centre, Bury General Hospital, Monday 25 April, 7.30 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions to arm.

Cambridge, Huntingdon, and Ely—At Seminar Room 2, Clinical School, Friday 29 April, 7.45 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions to arm.* (Preceded by buffet supper 7 pm.*)

Coventry—At Coventry and Warwickshire Postgraduate Centre, Tuesday 26 April, 8 pm, agm.*

Dewsbury—At Postgraduate Medical Centre, Dewsbury General Hospital, Tuesday 26 April, 8 pm, agm.

Dudley—At Board Room, Guest Hospital, Wednesday 27 April, 8.15 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions to arm.

East Herts—At Postgraduate Centre, QE II Hospital, Wednesday 27 April, 8.15 pm, agm.

Glasgow—At Smoke Room, University College Club, Thursday 28 April, 8 pm, agm.

Grampian—At Medico-Chirurgical Hall, Foresterhill, Tuesday 26 April, 8 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions to arm.

Manchester and Salford—At The Towers, Shirley Institute, Tuesday 26 April, 8 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions to arm.

North Birmingham, Lichfield, and Tamworth—At Postgraduate Centre, Good Hope Hospital, Tuesday 28 April, 7.30 for

8 pm, Dr J M Miles: "Business and pleasure in the Himalayas."* (Followed by meal. Spouses welcome.)

North-East Ulster Subdivision—At The Salmon Leap, Friday 29 April, 7.30 for 8 pm, annual dinner, speakers Dr Roger Austin and Mr Alan Cleland.*

Nottingham—At Main Lecture Theatre, Postgraduate Centre, Nottingham City Hospital, Friday 29 April, 7.30 pm, debate "The National Health Service is safe in this government's hands," speakers the Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke QC MP and Mr Graham Allen MP.

Rochdale—At Bateman Centre, Birch Hill Hospital, Monday 25 April, 8 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions for arm.

St Marylebone with Bloomsbury—At 3 Devonshire Place, W1, Thursday 28 April, 6.30 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions for arm.

Sandwell—At Postgraduate Centre, Sandwell District General Hospital, Tuesday 26 April, 8 pm, meeting to discuss motions for arm.

Stockport—At Gordon Thomas Suite, Manchester Airport, Wednesday 27 April, 6.30 pm, tour of airport, 8 pm, agm, 9 pm, supper.*

South Warwickshire—At Postgraduate Centre, Warwick Hospital, Wednesday 27 April, 7.30 for 8 pm, agm. (Coffee and sandwiches available.)

Tameside—At Postgraduate Centre, Tameside General Hospital, Wednesday 27 April, 7.15 pm; 8 pm, Dr Simon Jenkins: "Computers: help or hindrance in the NHS," 8.40 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions to arm.* (Preceded by buffet meal 7.15 for 7.30 pm.)*

Tower Hamlets—At The Surgery, 3-5 Merchant Street, Bow, Thursday 28 April, 7.30 for 8 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions to arm. (Refreshments provided.)

Wakefield and Pontefract—At Douglas Pickup Postgraduate Centre, Pontefract General Infirmary, Wednesday 27 April, 7.30 for 8 pm, wine tasting and buffet supper.* (Guests welcome.)

Waltham Forest—At Board Room, Whipps Cross Hospital, Thursday 28 April, 8 pm, agm.

West Hertfordshire—At Bulbourne Room, Civic Centre, Hemel Hempstead, Tuesday 26 April, 8 pm, meeting to discuss Annual Report of Council and motions for arm.

Regional meetings

East Anglian Regional Committee for Community Medicine and Community Health—At Board Room, East Anglian Regional Health Authority, Tuesday 26 April, 2.30 pm, agm.

North East Thames Committee for Hospital Medical Services—At BMA House, Tuesday 26 April, 5.30 pm.

Trent North Hospital Junior Staff Committee—At Board Room, Nether Edge Hospital, Tuesday 26 April, 7 pm, agm.

SOCIETIES AND LECTURES

For attending lectures marked * a fee is charged or a ticket is required. Applications should be made first to the institutions concerned.

Monday 25 April

INSTITUTE OF LARYNGOLOGY AND OTOTOLOGY—5.30 pm, guest lecture at an advanced level by Dr M Bagshaw: Motion sickness.

Tuesday 26 April

BALINT SOCIETY—At Long Room, Royal College of General Practitioners, 8 for 8.30 pm, discussion "Whatever happened to Balint?" followed by plenary session.

LONDON SCHOOL OF HYGIENE AND TROPICAL MEDICINE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH—At Goldsmiths' Theatre, 5 pm, ground round "Tuberculosis: the forgotten disease."

ROYAL MASONIC HOSPITAL—At School of Nursing, 7 pm, Dr M G C Ashby: Clinical syndromes of the cranial nerves. (Preceded by refreshments, 6.30 pm.)

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD ICRF CANCER EPIDEMIOLOGY AND CLINICAL TRIALS UNIT—At Ida Green Seminar Room, Observer's House, Green College, 5 pm, Ali McGuire: What do international comparisons of health care really show?

Wednesday 27 April

LONDON SPORTS MEDICINE INSTITUTE—At Medical College of St Bartholomew's Hospital, 7.15 pm, Dr Alan Silman: Joint mobility: asset or handicap?

ROYAL FREE HOSPITAL SCHOOL OF MEDICINE—At Seminar Room, 10th Floor, Royal Free Hospital, 5 pm, lecture by Dr John Callan: Peptic ulcer: can we improve treatment?

ROYAL POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL SCHOOL—At Stamp Lecture Theatre, 10.15 am, medical staff round.

Thursday 28 April

BLOOMSBURY RHEUMATOLOGY UNIT AND RHEUMATOLOGY RESEARCH DEPARTMENT—At 4th Floor Seminar Room, Arthur Stanley House, Tottenhamham Street, 4 pm, Dr Peter Brock: Drug development: the research dilemma.

Friday 29 April

SOCIETY OF APOTHECARIES OF LONDON FACULTY OF THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF MEDICINE AND PHARMACY—At Apothecaries' Hall, 6 pm, Gideon de Laune lecture by Dr E J Ewell: Victoria medicine: the Hoffmeister connection with the Royal Family.* (Preceded by tea 5.30 pm, followed by buffet supper.)

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COMING EVENTS

Medical Association for Prevention of War—Conference "Health care in war-torn countries," 5 May, London. Details from the MAPW Office, Sudbury, 16b Prince Arthur Road, London NW3 6AY. (Tel 01 794 1430.)

British Medical Association South Thames Regional Office—Career's Fair 1988, 11 May, St George's Hospital, London. Details from the office, 01 660 5558, or Dr J Parker-Williams, 01 672 1255.

Royal Society of Medicine Open Section—Seminar "The vision, the reality, and the choice," 1 June, London. Details from Mrs Françoise Barraud-Hebert at the society, 1 Wimpole Street, London W1M 8AE. (Tel 01 408 2119.)

Duphar Medical Relations Department—Symposium "Sleep disorders," 1 July, London. Details from Dr S W Parker of the department, Gaters Hill, West End, Southampton SO3 3JD. (Tel 0703 472281.)

St George's Hospital Medical School—Multidisciplinary conference "Promoting health and happiness in later life," 5 July, London. Details from Mrs Edna Watts, Geriatric Teaching and Research Unit, Jenner Wing G2, Cranmer Terrace, London SW17 0RE.

British Sociological Association Medical Sociology Group—Annual conference, 16-18 September, York. Details from the convenor, Steve Platt, MRC Unit for Epidemiological Studies in Psychiatry, Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Morningside Park, Edinburgh EH10 5HF. (Tel 031 447 2011.)

Eugenics Society—Symposium "Controlling legal additions," 22-23 September, London. Details from the general secretary of the society, c/o 235 Upper Richmond Road, London SW15 6SN. (Tel 01 780 1036.)

British Psychological Society District AIDS Counselling Unit—Meeting "Issues in AIDS counselling," 28 September, London. Details from Ms L Perry, administrator of the unit, Clinic 8, Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, London NW3 2QG. (Tel 01 431 0970.)

Institute of Family Therapy—Details and copies of the programme of teaching events summer/autumn are available from the institute, 43 New Cavendish Street, London W1M 7RG. (Tel 01 935 1651.)

Institute of Psychiatry—Details and copies of the programme of conferences and courses to October are available from the short course organiser at the institute, Nadine Morgan, De Crespigny Park, London SE5 8AF. (Tel 01 703 5411 ext 3170.)