

APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANT LOCUMS

The College's Recommendations

Problems have arisen from the appointment to locum Consultant posts of doctors who have not been sufficiently trained or experienced to be appointed to a substantive Consultant post. Problems arising from the appointment of locums have been compounded by recent legislation making it more difficult to employ doctors indefinitely in posts without apparent security of tenure. For these reasons the Court of Electors has considered the principles to be observed in making appointments to locum Consultant posts. The Court had the advantage of seeing a paper from the Conference of Medical Royal Colleges, and in the light of this support the following recommendations:

- (1) No doctor should be appointed to a short-term locum Consultant post (i.e. 3 months or less) who has not been sufficiently trained to assume all the responsibilities of a Consultant. This limits those eligible to:
 - (a) Recently retired Consultants in good health;
 - (b) Senior Registrars within a short time of completion of training;
 - (c) Fully trained Senior Registrars or others (as in (d)) who are not yet ready to commit themselves to a permanent post;
 - (d) Those trained under other comparable systems recognized by the College (e.g. overseas) but whose training has not necessarily been identical in form and content.
- (2) If applicants for short-term locum Consultant posts do not meet the conditions under (1) then either:
 - (a) No appointment should be made;
 - (b) An appointment should be made at a grade appropriate to the stage of training, e.g. Registrar, SHO, etc. if this enables some service to be maintained.

In no circumstances should a candidate be appointed to a post in which he would have to 'act up' beyond his trained capability. This would at best be inimical to the maintenance of standards and at worst dangerous to patients. Moreover it throws an excessive burden of responsibility upon other medical staff in the same and in associated specialties.

- (3) No appointment should be confirmed until the

Consultants who will be colleagues to the favoured candidate have personally checked his references with his former colleagues. This should be a mandatory provision.

- (4) The College will always be prepared to help in a general way from its fund of background knowledge, but is not prepared to hold lists of potential locums with opinions as to their suitability, (e.g. advice and confirmation can always be obtained on claims to possess a higher diploma of Membership or Fellowship and on the state of training reached in a higher professional training scheme).
- (5) The criteria of eligibility for appointment to Consultant status produced by the College are respected by employing authorities (with statutory support) and are designed to provide acceptable standards for the safety and care of patients. It would therefore be wrong to waive them for short-term appointments.

A statement of these criteria is sent to all College Assessors on Advisory Appointments Committees, and this is reproduced here on an Appendix for the benefit of other members of the College who may sit on Consultant Appointments Committees and to assist those about to make a locum Consultant appointment.
- (6) The guidelines should apply to all locum posts. Where it is anticipated that the locum arrangement will last for more than three months a full Advisory Appointments Committee should be convened.

- (7) Recent judgements of the Employment Appeal Tribunal have underlined the importance of careful consideration of locum tenens appointments. Evidence presented to this Tribunal has shown that some locums continue to hold their appointments for many years. On other occasions the appointment may be short and temporary. The Tribunal has pointed out that when a temporary appointment comes to an end it is the duty of the employing body to consider the position of the employee. What will then be appropriate will depend on the circumstances of each case (how long he or she has been employed, what the understanding was when the employee was engaged, what the circumstances are of the employing body, and so forth). However, the

irreducible minimum requirement is that the employee's position should be considered, and that he should not be treated upon the expiry of his short-term contract of employment as though he enjoyed no statutory rights at all.

APPENDIX CRITERIA FOR CONSULTANT POSTS IN PSYCHIATRY

1. The appointment to a Consultant post, whether in General Psychiatry or one of the other psychiatric specialties, a candidate must have undertaken a basic training in psychiatry and hold the MRCPsych or equivalent qualification. If there is an outstanding candidate, or circumstances are highly exceptional, other relevant qualifications and experience may constitute an acceptable alternative.
2. The successful candidate should normally have reached the age of 32, but there is no bar to the appointment of younger applicants.
3. Due weight should be attached to breadth of experience, participation in organized rotation schemes, periods spent abroad in relevant posts, and work in medical fields allied to psychiatry.

The view of the College is that the responsibilities of all Consultant posts include the function of training those in medical and related disciplines, so that some teaching experience and supervision of trainees is desirable in candidates for appointment as Consultant. Experience in research, especially if this has proved worthy of publication, may enhance a candidate's application. But even the most outstanding experience of the kind should not be allowed to over-ride the essential requirements laid down in (1) above.

N.B.—The First Report of the Joint Committee on Higher Psychiatric Training (1975) also indicates the content of higher training experience which should be obtained prior to full specialist status being accorded. The normal situation would be for three years of general professional training to be required, but with a total of five years training in psychiatry being the absolute minimum. Formal specialist accreditation will not be available before 1977.

4. Specific requirements for various types of Consultant posts are as follows:

(a) General Psychiatry

Training posts in psychiatry for a minimum of five years, including two or three years in the Senior Registrar grade; substantial experience in general adult psychiatry as practised in different settings.

(b) Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

The basic training in general psychiatry should have been followed by experience in all aspects of the specialty in a Senior Registrar training post, preferably for a period as long as three years.

(c) Mental Subnormality (Mental Handicap)

The basic training in general psychiatry should have been followed by experience in the practice of psychiatry with the mentally subnormal, including medical and social aspects of investigation and management; this experience should preferably be in a Senior Registrar training post for a period of three years, but experience in a related field should be given due weight.

(d) Forensic Psychiatry

The basic training in general psychiatry should have been followed by experience in Forensic Psychiatry, preferably in a Senior Registrar training post, usually for a period of three years. Experience in a related field should be given due weight.

(e) Psychotherapy

The basic training in general psychiatry should have been followed by specialist training and experience for a period of not less than three years in the practice of psychotherapy, preferably in a Senior Registrar training post.

(f) Consultants in general psychiatry with a specialist interest in a named specialty.

Posts are sometimes advertised for Consultants to work in general psychiatry and to take special interest in alcoholism, other addictions, behaviour therapy, epilepsy, psychogeriatrics etc. In such cases, the basic training in general psychiatry and the subsequent experience in a Senior Registrar training post should together be of at least five years' duration. During the course of this period the candidate should have had such experience as to justify his claim to expertise in the special field; but he should also have had more than the basic experience in general psychiatry. The total length of experience, including time in a Senior Registrar training post should be at least five years.