



columns

their own is to ask us to imagine that an aeroplane with a mind of its own decided not to follow the pilot's landing instructions. But I do not think the analogy is very valid in relation to homicide inquiries. One will surely agree that when a plane crashes, the inquiry will have to look at what part or parts failed and why. If there was wear and tear, why was this not identified and rectified prior to the flight, and more important was this oversight a negligent act? If the plane had a structural defect due to a 'harsh' landing the previous day, which was not corrected prior to the next flight, surely some one was culpable and possibly negligent? Equating a crash enquiry with a homicide inquiry is oversimplifying a very complex

and quite understandably an emotional issue. Maybe if we had civil suits of negligence in homicide cases instead of inquiries, we would not feel so aggrieved, as the team would have its chance to defend its practices (which should in any case be within standards of reasonable care adopted by the profession).

Sameer P. Sarkar Specialist Registrar in Forensic Psychiatry, Ashen Hill, The Drive, Hellingly, Hailsham, East Sussex BN27 4ER

Split posts register for psychotherapy

Sir: At the recent Psychotherapy Faculty meeting in Bristol some consultants

working both as psychotherapists and as general psychiatrists felt it would be helpful to liaise with others who also hold 'split' posts. I have been asked to coordinate an informal register of such individuals which would form the basis of a future network. I would like to invite anyone in a substantive split post involving psychotherapy to contact me with their details: who they are, where they work and what the designated split is in terms of specialisms and sessions.

Sally Mitchison Consultant Psychiatrist with Special Responsibility for Psychotherapy, Cherry Knowle Hospital, Ryhope, Sunderland S22 0NB

the college

Proposal for a Special Interest Group in Neuropsychiatry

Procedure for establishing a Special Interest Group:

- Any member wishing to establish a Special Interest Group shall write to the Registrar with relevant details.
- The Registrar shall forward the application to Council.
- If Council approves the principle of establishing such a Special Interest Group, then it will direct the Registrar to place a notice in the *Psychiatric Bulletin*, or its equivalent, asking members of the College to write in support of such a Group and expressing willingness to participate in its activities.
- If at least 120 members reply to this notice, then Council shall formally approve the establishment of the Special Interest Group.

In accordance with this procedure, Council has approved the establishment of a Special Interest Group in Neuropsychiatry, to provide a focus within the College in relation to this area of practice.

Members are invited to write in support of this Group and express willingness to participate in its activities. Interested members should write to Miss Sue Duncan at the College. If 120 members reply to this notice, then Council shall formally approve the establishment of this Special Interest Group.

Mike Shooter Registrar, Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG

New College policies

The College has always been committed to providing a supportive working environment for all of its employees. Council has recently approved a formal College policy providing protection from harassment in employment. The policy specifically covers sexual and racial harassment and bullying in the context of working relationships, not only between employees of the College, but also between College Members and employees.

Sexual and racial harassment

Harassment may be defined as inappropriate behaviour, actions, comments or physical contact that is objectionable or causes offence. Harassment can take many forms, from that which may appear relatively minor (e.g. a single insensitive comment) to the more serious (e.g. persistent offensive remarks, physical contact or abuse). What is acceptable to one person may not be to another, so the issue is not one of intention, but of the effect the actions or behaviour of an individual or individuals have on another individual or group.

Bullying

Bullying is persistent, abusive, intimidating, malicious or offensive behaviour and/or abuse of power which makes the target feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable and which undermines their

self-confidence. While it is unpleasant to be the recipient of someone's occasional aggressive behaviour, such behaviour would normally be considered to fall outside the definition of bullying or harassment.

Resolution

- If an employee feels that he or she has been the victim of harassment, they are advised to make it clear to the harasser either verbally or in writing, explaining the distress which the unacceptable behaviour is causing and that it must stop.
- Where informal methods fail or where serious harassment occurs, employees are advised to seek the assistance of the Head of Central Secretariat and Personnel who may be able to resolve the matter or who can assist in invoking the College's grievance procedure.
- The College will treat seriously any breaches of this policy and all instances of actual or alleged inappropriate behaviour will be fully investigated and appropriate action taken. If an allegation is made by a College employee against a College member, the Registrar will be involved in any investigation.

This is a summary of the main provisions of the policy. Further information is available from the Head of Central Secretariat and Personnel.

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