

Correspondence

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Contents: Fractured femurs in the mentally handicapped/US visas and 'insanity'/Doll phobia revisited/Historical melancholia/ECT in old age/Pimozide in pathological jealousy/Syphilis screening/Lipopigment in the CNS/Tardive dystonia/Nicotine and dementia/Depression-dependent exacerbation of TD/Physical morbidity of psychiatric patients/Benzodiazepines unabashed/Remission of psychotic symptoms after burn injury.

Fractured femurs in the mentally handicapped

SIR: Findings from the studies of Lau *et al* (1988) and Cooper *et al* (1988), on physical activity and calcium intake in fractures of the proximal femur in Hong Kong and in Britain, point to the fact that in order to protect against hip fractures it is important for elderly people to maintain daily physical activities and the required calcium intake.

We have completed a survey of the mentally handicapped population over 40 years of age in four hospitals in Bristol. There were 366 men and 365 women, of whom 55 men and 62 women sustained one or more fractures (72 and 110 fractures respectively). In the survey there were 36 fractures of the proximal femur (16 in men and 20 in women). Most of the patients with hip fractures were severely mentally handicapped and ages ranged from 44 to 77 years (mean age 57.3) in men and from 40 to 73 years (mean age 59.9) in women.

Apart from decreasing physical activity because of severe mental handicap and ageing processes, there were other factors which were impairing daily physical activities and mobility. Nine patients were on anticonvulsant therapy, eight were receiving anti-psychotic drugs, two suffered from blindness, and eleven had debilitating physical disorders. The findings illustrate that decreased physical activity and mobility in the mentally handicapped is one of the risk factors for hip fractures in elderly patients.

It is therefore important that, with the marked increase in longevity of the mentally handicapped population (Carter & Jancar, 1983), patients should continue with daily activities as long as possible, regular exercise should be encouraged, and calcium

levels monitored, thus helping with protection against hip and other fractures.

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US visas and 'insanity'

SIR: There seems to be a widespread belief that compulsory admission under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983 adversely affects a person's ability to obtain a visa to enter the United States of America. We asked 16 mental health professionals (11 section-12 approved psychiatrists and 5 approved social workers) from two local hospitals how they thought mental illness and/or compulsory admission affected the ability of an individual to obtain a US visa: ten believed compulsory admission was the major factor, five were unsure, and one (a social worker) believed it was dependent upon the type of mental illness. Eight professionals said they would be less likely to detain a patient who wanted to obtain a US visa. We know of several recent cases in which the visa issue was considered important in deciding whether or not to detain the patient in hospital.

In order to clarify the situation, we wrote to the Visa Branch of the US Embassy who provided the following information: the US Immigration and Nationality Act stipulates that persons who are or have been 'insane' are ineligible for visas. However, the Attorney General can waive these ineligibilities and a person with a history of 'insanity' who is certified by a competent medical authority to be currently well may be granted a visa (visitor, temporary, or