

AN ADVISORY SERVICE FOR RESEARCH WORKERS

DEAR SIR,

Many of the papers which are published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* could be written up almost completely before any experimental work is begun. In some cases even the 'Results' section could be completed with the exception of one or two gaps, and two alternative 'Discussion' sections could be written in anticipation of a positive or negative result. If papers were presented to you in this form, I wonder if you would be prepared to assess them, and perhaps even to accept them in advance for publication, on condition that the experimental work was subsequently carried out according to the method described. If you were to provide this service, and any of your contributors were sufficiently self-disciplined to take advantage of it, I venture to submit that the following advantages might accrue:

1. Certain papers could be rejected in advance before the authors had wasted too much time on them. Such papers might concern experiments whose results would not be of sufficient interest (for instance a comparison of two drugs whose action is already known to be very similar); or experiments designed in such a way that interpretation of the results would be impossible.
2. Other experimental designs could be modified in advance to remove biases or to increase efficiency.
3. It is widely thought (I hope incorrectly) that journals are more likely to publish work showing positive results than work which is completely negative in its conclusions, and therefore some investigators might be reluctant to take the trouble to write up and submit negative results. However, if an experiment is worth doing, then it is surely worth reporting. Acceptance for publication before the hypothesis is put to the test might help to counteract the bias against the publication of negative findings.
4. The exercise of writing up Introduction, Method, the skeleton of Results and Discussion of any possible findings before starting the actual work should help investigators to think more clearly about the work they are doing.
5. It would make more work for the assessors but would surely make their job more pleasant. It must be distressing to have to recommend the rejection of a paper over which a colleague has expended many

hours of devoted effort. For the contributor it would help to avoid, or at least soften, the pain of rejection.

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BURDEN RESEARCH MEDAL AND PRIZE

DEAR SIR,

I am writing to draw your readers' attention to this new annual award, which has been founded by The Burden Trust. It will be known as 'The Burden Research Medal and Prize' and is intended to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of the foundation of Stoke Park Hospital by the Rev. H. N. Burden on 1 April, 1909, and to encourage future research in the field of mental subnormality.

The Burden Research Medal and Prize for 1969 total value £250, may be presented on or about 1 April, 1970, at Stoke Park Hospital, for outstanding research work which has been published or presented as a paper to a learned society during 1969.

The award is open to all registered medical practitioners who are working in the field of mental subnormality in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland.

Five copies of the paper or papers, with application form, should be submitted to the secretary of the Burden Trust by 10 January, 1970.

Further information and application forms are available from the Secretary, Burden Trust, 16, Orchard Street, Bristol, 1.

THE 5th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

DEAR SIR,

The 5th International Conference on Suicide Prevention took place in London on 24-27 September. The ninety-six papers delivered will be issued in full or edited form in the duplicated Proceedings which should be available before the end of 1969, price 20s. Orders, including remittance, should be placed now with the Conference Secretary, I.A.S.P., 43 Queen Anne Street, London, W.1.

RICHARD FOX.

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