

Annual Report

Association of CHCs for England and Wales

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In reporting on the year recently completed, it is possible to be brief, and yet to deal comprehensively with the work and preoccupations of the Association during the year. Two issues have dominated everything else — in the first half of the year the threat to the right of CHCs to consultation by health authorities where "substantial variations" to health services were being proposed, and in the second, the threat to the very existence of CHCs in the shape of the Government's consultation paper "Patients First"

Despite these circumstances, it is very pleasing

to record that all the projects and activities started prior to August 1979 made progress during the year. The reports of the studies on Casualty Services and NHS Dentistry were published in November 1979 and May 1980 respectively, and the seminar on Pharmacy took place on 14 February 1980. Activity on the part of the working groups was limited. No changes were made to the membership of the groups operative at the beginning of the year, and those concerned with Communication and Well Women did not meet after November 1979. Ad hoc groups set up during the year were active however, and reference is made to these at later stages in the report.

Annual General Meeting

The first residential AGM was held at York University on 19 and 20 September 1979. More than 400 representatives of 203 CHCs attended, and 134 policy motions were submitted. The meeting took place in the great hall of the University; 22 of the motions were taken, and Prof. F S Brimblecombe, Chairman of the Children's Committee, addressed the meeting as guest speaker. His subject was child health and perinatal mortality, a subject of major interest to participating CHCs and the source of a number of policy motions.

Resolutions adopted by the AGM were forwarded to ministers at the DHSS, and followed up during the year in a number of ways. Motions not taken at the AGM were considered by the Standing Committee at its various meetings during the year, and this work was completed at the July 1980 meeting. To assist in implementing the resolution on perinatal mortality, a working group on Maternity Services and allied questions was formed under the chairmanship of Mr John Austin-Walker (Greenwich CHC). The group met during the spring of 1980, and presented its report and recommendations to the July 1980 meeting of the Standing Committee.

Comment by CHCs following the AGM

led the Standing Committee to consider a number of possible alterations to the style of the meeting, and some resultant changes are being made this year.

Consultation

Perhaps the most topical issue at the AGM was that of consultation between health authorities and CHCs. An emergency debate resulted in a unanimous decision instructing the Standing Committee to meet the Secretary of State and to reassert the right of CHCs to consultation when hospital closures and similar changes were under consideration by health authorities. This right had been undermined by Mr Jenkin in a letter to the Chairman of the North West Thames Regional Health Authority, which had been given wide circulation.

Following court actions by Lewisham Borough Council in support of Lewisham CHC, and by Guy's CHC which although unsuccessful cast some doubt on the content of Mr Jenkin's letter, a meeting took place with Dr Vaughan at which the right of CHCs to consultation in all normal circumstances was acknowledged, and in mid-December 1979 a letter was sent from the DHSS to all regional health authorities stressing that consultation should take place other than where emergencies (such as an

outbreak of infection) cause a hospital, ward or department to be closed without any delay. These measures played a substantial part in eliminating the difficulties under which CHCs had been placed by Mr Jenkin's letter to the RHA chairman.

Patients First

Almost simultaneously with the letter to regional health authorities, the Government also published its consultative paper in response to the report of the Royal Commission on the NHS. This proposed a new management structure for the health service, and questioned the continuing need for CHCs under the arrangements envisaged, remarking on the estimated annual cost of CHCs at £4m. The AGM had called for a Special General Meeting to consider the report of the Royal Commission and the Government's response, and this took place at the Wembley Conference Centre on 15

September 1979
August 1980

February 1980. Mr Jenkin attended the Special General Meeting, and set out the arguments in favour of and against the retention of CHCs, as they were being presented to him. He assured the meeting that he had an open mind on the question.

Action had already been initiated to produce an effective reply to "Patients First". A discussion paper had been drawn up; contact had been made with a number of voluntary, academic and professional organisations known to be interested in the future of CHCs, and the Chairman had embarked on a series of visits to meetings and seminars arranged with CHCs in most parts of the country to consider the case for retention. In response to requests from CHCs for information, Ms Rosemary Davies was engaged part-time for the consultation period to collate as much relevant information as possible on the progress of consultation on "Patients First" and the evidence being submitted to the DHSS, and to disseminate it to CHCs. A working group was established to prepare the Association's own evidence, under the chairmanship of the Chairman.

Representatives of the working group had the opportunity to discuss this evidence with Mr Jenkin at the House of Commons on 8 July. While he was not prepared to give any assurances concerning the future of CHCs at this meeting, the statement he made to the House on 23 July embodied a number of points arising during the discussion. While there is still to be debate regarding the "membership, role and powers" of CHCs, their continued existence is no longer in doubt.

The work done by Rosemary Davies was of particular value in collecting information from all manner of sources, and in keeping CHCs in touch with developments, and their morale as high as possible. Our indebtedness to her for this is readily acknowledged. Ms Davies' contribution to the success of the CHC case has been a significant one.

In Parliament

While "Patients First" was attracting the bulk of general attention, the Health Services Bill was making its way through the parliamentary process, embodying the measures which will enable the Government to give effect to its proposals in "Patients

First" and its election manifesto.

An eye was kept on the content of the Bill and its progress on the floor of the House, and in committee. A brief was prepared for members of the committee, giving an assessment of the effect of statutory cash limits being applied annually to health authorities.

During the progress of the Bill, the Government announced its intention to introduce a charge for initial eye examination by an optician, to remove exemption from dental charges from young persons between 16 and 21, and to increase prescription fees to £1.00. Objections were lodged to all these measures, and it is a matter of record that the Government has since withdrawn its proposals regarding optical charges, and modified those imposing the dental charge. At the time of writing, the Government still intends to proceed with the increase in the prescription charge.

On the principles underlying charges, it was decided to consult with the BMA and the Pharmaceutical Society, to see how much common ground there was between the prescribing and dispensing professions and ourselves. The meeting took place at the Kings Fund Centre on 23 July, and a considerable amount of ground was covered. There was no basis for any joint position, but the exchange of views was valuable.

Following the adoption of a resolution at the 1979 AGM calling for the NHS to be exempted from Value Added Tax, the case has been argued vigorously with ministers, with the principal opposition spokesmen, and with backbench health and social services groups on both sides of the House of Commons. Representations have also been made to Members of Parliament in support of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act.

Breaking New Ground

A new area of interest in the year was NHS Industrial Relations. Having reviewed developments since early 1979 at its November meeting, the Standing Committee asked the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to meet the TUC and the NHS trade unions to discover what positive plans they had for improving industrial relations in the NHS. These meetings have been

valuable, interesting and informative, offering the prospect of a positive contribution from the union side, while enhancing the unions' appreciation of the work of CHCs.

Meetings also took place with the main organisations representative of the nursing profession, and with the Registrar of the General Nursing Council. These enabled a much greater understanding of questions of current concern to nurses, and a report was presented to the July 1980 meeting of the Standing Committee, and has subsequently been circulated to CHCs for information.

CHC News and Information Service

CHC News is a monthly, 16-page magazine, intended primarily as a forum where CHC members and staff can discuss their work. It also aims to provide CHCs with relevant information on aspects of the NHS and broader health issues. Print-run is 8,000 copies, of which about 6,600 are sent free to CHCs. The staff of three also run an information service, which can be used directly by CHC members and members of the public, as well as by CHC staff.

The magazine's staff are employed by ACHCEW, though all funds for *CHC News* and the information service come directly from the DHSS. The magazine is editorially independent of ACHCEW and the Department, and the information service is careful to avoid speaking on behalf of CHCs or of the Association.

In April 1979 *CHC News* increased in size from 12 to 16 pages, and the new 16-page format seems to be working well. In September 1979 the magazine changed printers, the main benefit being a more flexible production schedule. This has permitted much more up-to-date coverage of the "Patients First" debate than would otherwise have been possible.

Staffing is barely adequate to cope with the total workload, and when a member of staff is ill or on holiday the remaining staff are placed under considerable stress.

Because of this, work on the *CHC News* index has been at a standstill since late last year, and at the time of writing the Directory of CHCs has been out of print for several months. Much more time also needs to be spent on keeping the information and

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press cuttings files in good order. A new Directory should be ready by the time this report is published.

In March 1980 Vivian Sanders left *CHC News* to have a baby, and the Editorial Board appointed Dave Bradney to succeed her as editor. The magazine has benefited enormously from Vivian's editorial skills and tenacious organising. The vacant post of assistant editor was filled by Jenny Keating, a member of Wandsworth and East Merton CHC.

Membership and Finance

214 CHCs are in membership of the Association at 1 August 1980. While it is a cause for satisfaction that there are only 14 CHCs not in membership, it has to be recorded that two CHCs have withdrawn from membership during the year, and several others have taken a critical look at their own membership before deciding to continue. There will inevitably be some changes from year to year, but it remains important that the Association keeps its own performance and aptitude to the needs of CHCs permanently under review.

Finance taken up in 1979/80 amounted to £57,000 for *CHC News* (DHSS funding) and £31,350 subscription income to the Association from member CHCs. In addition, £1,998 was earned from sales of *CHC News* and £1,923 through interest on deposit account. £4,000 was received from the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust to finance the Dentistry study and £13,411 passed through the books as payments for the AGM and other meetings.

CHC News expenditure for the year amounted to £58,294, and the Association spent £55,198, including £5,000 paid to the London Hospital Medical School for the Dentistry study. An increase in subscription for 1981/82 looks inescapable. Audited accounts are available for inspection on request.

Personal

August 1980 sees a major change in the membership of the Standing Committee, as many as half the members ceasing to be eligible by virtue of having completed their two terms of office as members of CHCs. While this kind of turnover is certain to be a continuing feature of the composition of the Standing Committee, the scale on which it

takes place will never be greater than this year. Among this year's departures, there are people whose contribution to CHCs both nationally and at local level has been of the greatest importance, and they will be sorely missed. Other members have retired during the year or at its conclusion for personal reasons or to make way for the second generation. The measure of this change may be appreciated by reference to the names of those concerned at the end of this report.

Members were saddened to learn of the death during June 1980 of Mr Ernest Nobbs, Standing Committee representative from Wessex region, and their sympathy was extended to his family and to his colleagues on East Dorset CHC.

Reference has been made above to the *CHC News* staff changes during the year. The Association secretariat was strengthened by the appointment in November 1979 of Mrs Rose Walter as part-time shorthand typist. The office was also stimulated by the presence for much of the year of Dr Erica Bates, Senior Lecturer in Health Administration at the University of New South Wales, who in June 1980 completed a sabbatical year in England, studying the structure and functioning of CHCs and the Association.

Looking Ahead

At this stage in the history of CHCs, looking ahead to the next phase is more important than it has so far been. We must build on the Government's decision to retain CHCs, and reap the advantages of having been brought under close scrutiny, and found to be satisfactory.

With two critical preoccupations during the year, and with the mass of work generated by the York AGM and the motions submitted to it, it is evident that the Association has not been able to break significant new ground. Yet we have looked ahead, stating our case wherever possible, and participating from the user point of view in the launching of the Government's new hospital policy, and in the review of ambulance and general patient transport services carried out for the DHSS. The working group on Ambulance Services, chaired by Mrs Joy Mostyn (South Hammersmith CHC), was reconvened for the purpose.

We have also been active in preparatory

work for the 1981 International Year of Disabled People, and intend during 1981 to develop principles adopted for International Year of the Child in connection with the health care of mentally handicapped children.

In our response to "Patients First", we urged an inquiry into health services in London, as recommended by the Royal Commission on the NHS, and at the July 1980 meeting of the Standing Committee it was agreed to set up a joint ACHCEW/CHC inquiry in collaboration with the CHCs in Greater London. This group intends to make its report about the end of 1980.

These are some of the themes which will be developed during the coming year, but equally as pressing will be the need to move forward from the position after "Patients First". CHCs must get the boost that their survival warrants and a major concern must be to ensure that they receive systematic and effective publicity support both locally and nationally. This will be the first priority task for the year ahead.

Alongside this, the Association must reassess itself, its relationship to member CHCs and the services it provides for them. In November 1979 the Standing Committee decided on the need for a constitutional review once the future became clear, and it is now time for this to be undertaken. The review must be comprehensive, and must be made in such a way that CHCs have an opportunity to make clear what they want from their Association in the next stage of its development. It will then be the responsibility of the Association to meet their wishes, and preparing to do so will be the main underlying task for 1980/81.

Chairman's Footnote

There is nothing that I or anyone else can say which conveys the debt that we owe to our staff this year. We have been lucky in the services that we have had for all or part of the time from Rose Walter, John Mather and Rosemary Davies, but their efforts on our behalf have only been possible because of the work of Chye Choo and Mike Gerrard. Virtually every CHC on the ground helped in the battle for survival but I am sure that all would agree that without Chye and Mike we would have found our work uncoordinated and probably impossible.

Appendix

Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales 1979/80

Chairman: Dr R K Griffiths (Central Birmingham CHC; West Midlands Region)
Vice-Chairman: Mr D M Thomas (Cardiff CHC; Wales)

Honorary Treasurer: Mr N Swift (Bury CHC; to November 1979), Mr E Thomas (Dewsbury CHC; from February 1980)

Members of the Standing Committee

Mr G S Bessey (East Cumbria CHC; Northern Region)
Professor G N Jenkins (Newcastle CHC; Northern Region)
Mr J L Rosen (Leeds Eastern CHC; Yorkshire Region)
Mr K Henderson (Scarborough CHC; Yorkshire Region)
Mr A Goodson (South Lincolnshire CHC; Trent Region)
Mr G H Sharpe (North West Leicestershire CHC; Trent Region)
Mr A S Watts (Norwich CHC; East Anglia Region)
Lady M Marre (Edgware/Hendon CHC; North West Thames Region)
Mrs J Mostyn (South Hammersmith CHC; North West Thames Region)
Dr J S S Fairley (West Essex and District CHC; North East Thames Region)
Mrs R Bucky (Haringey CHC; North East Thames Region)
Mr J E Austin-Walker (Greenwich CHC; South East Thames Region)
Mrs V Harris (Maidstone CHC; South East Thames Region) (to December 1979)
Mr R M I Thomas (Canterbury and Thanet CHC; South East Thames Region) (from January 1980)
Mr H E Buttery (South West Surrey CHC; South West Thames Region) (to March 1980)
Mrs P Stinchcombe (Chichester CHC; South West Thames Region) (from April 1980)
Mrs W Pickett (North Surrey CHC; South West Thames Region) (from April 1980)
Mr A P Ridley (Portsmouth CHC; Wessex Region)
Mr E W Nobbs (East Dorset CHC; Wessex Region) (Deceased June 1980)
Mrs E Collins (Wycombe CHC; Oxford Region)
Count Charles de Salis (East Somerset CHC; South Western Region)
Mrs M Perriam (Weston CHC; South Western Region)
Mr P C E Moodie (West Birmingham CHC; West Midlands Region)
Mrs G I Bourne (Crewe CHC; Mersey Region)
Cllr. G Sampey (Macclesfield CHC; Mersey Region)
Mr N Swift (Bury CHC; North Western Region) (to February 1980)

Mr J W Ballard (Oldham CHC; North Western Region)
Mr T G Harrison (Salford CHC; North Western Region) (from April 1980)
Cllr W D Evans (Carmarthen/Dinefwr CHC; Wales)
Mr Henry Williams (Clwyd South CHC; Wales) (to June 1980)
Mr W G Davies (Montgomery CHC; Wales) (to June 1980)
Mr T Wesley Hughes (Clwyd North CHC; Wales) (from July 1980)
Mr Owen Owen (Ceredigion CHC; Wales) (from July 1980)

Members of the Standing Committee who retired at 31 August 1980

Mr J W Ballard (Oldham CHC; North Western Region)
Mr G S Bessey (East Cumbria CHC; Northern Region)
Mrs R Bucky (Haringey CHC; North East Thames Region)
Mr W G Davies (Montgomery CHC; Wales)
Dr J S S Fairley (West Essex and District CHC; North East Thames Region)
Mr A Goodson (South Lincolnshire CHC; Trent Region)
Mr K Henderson (Scarborough CHC; Yorkshire Region)
Lady M Marre (Edgware/Hendon CHC; North West Thames Region)
Mrs J Mostyn (South Hammersmith CHC; North West Thames Region)
Mr J L Rosen (Leeds Eastern CHC; Yorkshire Region)
Count Charles de Salis (East Somerset CHC; South Western Region)
Mr G H Sharpe (North West Leicestershire CHC; Trent Region)
Mr A S Watts (Norwich CHC; East Anglia Region)
Mr H Williams (Clwyd South CHC; Wales)

Secretary Observers

Mrs V Bolter (Newcastle CHC; Northern and Yorkshire Regions)
Mrs R A V Shadbolt (Bury St Edmunds CHC; Trent and East Anglia Regions)
Mrs J Gornall (Haverling CHC; North East Thames and North West Thames Regions)
Mr G Girvan (Bexley CHC; South East Thames and South West Thames Regions)
Mr B Thompson (Southmead CHC; Wessex and South Western Regions)
Mr D Saunders (Salop CHC; Oxford and West Midlands Regions)
Mr C Clews (Salford CHC; Mersey and North Western Regions)
Mr E A Griffiths (Llanelli/Dinefwr CHC; Wales)

Editorial Board of CHC News

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Mr J Austin-Walker

Mr G S Bessey
Mr B Taylor
Mr E Thomas
Miss V Sanders (to 29-2-80)
Mr D Bradney (from 1-3-80)
Mr M A Gerrard

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Mr D M Thomas
Cllr L Poole
Mrs J Mostyn
Mr A Goodson
Mrs M Perriam
Mr D Saunders
Mr T Richardson
Mr M A Gerrard
Ms R Davies

Working Group on Maternity Services

Mr J E Austin-Walker (Chairman)
Mrs E Collins
Dr R K Griffiths
Mrs M Merricks
Mr D M Thomas
Miss Chye Choo

Working Group on Ambulance and Patient Transport Services

Mrs J Mostyn (Chairman)
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Mr P M Topham
Mr A S Watts
Mr M A Gerrard

Working Group on Health Services in London

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Mrs B Hudson
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Mr A Patterson
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Mr T I Richardson
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Mr M A Gerrard

Staff

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Assistant Secretary: Chye Choo
Secretarial Assistant (part time): Rose Walter
Editor of CHC News:
Vivian Sanders (to 29-2-80),
Dave Bradney (from 1-3-80)
Assistant Editors: Dave Bradney (to 29-2-80)
Janet Hadley, Jenny Keating (from 1-3-80)