

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

STANDING COMMITTEE NEWS

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Stop Press

As CHC members prepared to debate the Report of the Committee of Enquiry at the AGM, 7-8 June 1984, the Minister of Health, Kenneth Clarke brusquely cancelled a meeting with ACHCEW's Officers (at 24 hours notice) which had been scheduled for 23rd May to discuss the stark financial options open to the Association. No alternative dates were offered then. Later, on 29th May, a late June, early July date was suggested.

Quite unrelated, of course, but the Northern RHA has just notified CHCs of a 2% (or much larger if fixed costs are considered) cut in budgets which average £30,000 while the SE Thames RHA is reviewing the staffing of CHCs because, it seems, CHC staff are doing too much, (or more than was intended or more than is convenient to NHS management?).

News of other Regional "initiatives" is awaited with interest and, after the AGM, we may be in a position to issue a proper report.

Rate Capping - A False Economy?

The Government's proposal to introduce rate capping is running into a great deal of criticism even from its own supporters. There are genuine fears of what will happen when control is centralised from Whitehall by officials who do not understand the different needs of different areas and also as to just how cost effective the measure will prove in the long term.

There is no doubt that community health services will be affected. Peter Draper has prepared a probing report on the health implications of the measure for the Association of London Authorities but he points out that while his brief was to look at the position in London, his conclusions would apply to any other inner city areas.

He quotes the Royal Commission on the NHS (1979) which stated: "To put into perspective what may be accomplished by the NHS, it must be understood that many of the main improvements in the health of the nation have come not from advances in medical treatment but from public health measures, better nutrition and improvement in the economic, social and natural environments."

The position today shows no cause for complacency. For instance, England and Wales lie eighth in Europe in the infant mortality league - 12 per 1000 live births, as against 6.9 for Sweden. Local government services contribute to prevention and health promotion in many ways - through the maintenance of sewers (one of the most obvious), food inspection (typhoid and para-typhoid were major killers in the 19th century), monitoring of air, water and land pollution, disposal of toxic wastes, and general street cleaning. Local government provides residential care, day care and the domiciliary and community support services like home helps, meals on wheels and social workers. Many "high spenders" spend because they also have the highest number of problems, poor housing, high unemployment, an

cont/2

ageing population, overcrowding and a high level of mental and physical illness. This requires special funding for special needs. As the report concludes: "Finally, whilst rate-capping is being advanced on grounds of economy, the economic implications of jeopardising health-relevant services are negative for two reasons. First, where prevention and health promotion fail, there are all the costs associated with treatment and loss of work. Second, where more appropriate and less expensive community care is not provided, much higher institutional costs are incurred. For example, the current costs in a non-teaching hospital are £200 to £300 per week".

The Health Implications of Rate Capping by Peter Draper is available free from The Association of London Authorities, Room 692, County Hall, London SE1 7PB.

Health and the Economy - the NHS Crisis in Perspective, is a report, edited by Peter Draper and Tony Smart, based on the proceedings of a conference held on January 6, 1984 at Guy's Hospital. Subjects covered include What is Happening to the NHS, Public Health and Sick Economies, Health and the Economic Policy, Ways Forward and an appendix of useful information. There is a postscript by Sir James Brotherton. Among the many contributors is ACHCEW Secretary Tony Smythe who provided one of the discussion papers in which he suggests that the present crisis facing the NHS is entirely financial but is partly a question of lack of values and vision. Support for the NHS is not easy to mobilise because people do not understand how it works or the relationship between it and the economy. This has led to a "fatalistic acceptance" within and outside the NHS that we cannot afford to make improvements or even to maintain standards.

Health and the Economy is available from the Department of Community Medicine, Guy's Hospital Medical School, London S.E.1. Price £5 inc. p and p. Cheques to be made payable to the Department of Community Medicine, Guy's Hospital Medical School.

"The Wrong Kind of Medicine" - a critical guide to over 800 ineffective, or inappropriately or extravagantly prescribed drugs by Charles Medewar of Social Audit, published by the Consumers' Association and Hodder & Stoughton, price £3.95. Essential for CHCs faced with perplexed consumers and drugs policy issues.

BMA and seat belts

The BMA is asking MPs to help save more lives on the road by supporting the compulsory fitting of rear seat belts in all new cars. In a letter to MPs supporting Austin Mitchell's Private Members' Bill Dr. John Harvard, Secretary of the BMA, explains the risks to children and elderly people of failing to wear such belts. "Studies in Sweden have shown that the injury reducing rate for rear seat belts is 28% for adults and 52% for children". Dr. Harvard also quotes a reported drop of 25% in deaths and serious injuries among front seat occupants in the first eight months of the new law making the wearing of seat belts compulsory.

Caesarian Birth

In spite of the move towards more natural childbirth, which is being welcomed by many women, there is always the possibility that it might be necessary to deliver a baby by

caesarian section for very real medical reasons. The Greater Manchester Caesarian Support Network has produced a good booklet, written by Sue Johnson and Kathy Parody, themselves Caesarian mothers, on all you need to know about caesarian birth and after. It covers everything from choice of anaesthetic (if there's time) to coping at home with the baby and stresses that just because one baby has been delivered this way, it does not have to mean it will be necessary again. The booklet costs 50p plus 20p p and p and is available from Sue Johnson, 11 Duke St., Astley, Manchester M29 7BG. It would be useful to CHCs who might be questioned on the subject.

Respite Care

Over 80% of handicapped children now live at home most of the time. A new booklet shows that schemes giving parents a break from the demanding care needed can vary from a few hours to several weeks and can be provided either in another family home, a residential unit or by a sitter-in in the child's own home. A variety of services is provided by voluntary and statutory agencies and groups. As well as detailing what is available, the booklet gives advice to those thinking of setting up respite schemes, and it also offers a directory of schemes and contacts.

Respite Care Services by Ann Robinson is available from the National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE. Price £1.80 inc. p & p (£1.30 to members).

Advisory Committee on Genetic Manipulation

The Health and Safety Commission has approved the appointment of the members of the Advisory Committee on Genetic Manipulation (ACGM) under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Williams. Its primary responsibility will be to advise the HSC and the HSE in connection with their responsibilities under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and certain Ministers on other relevant matters. The Committee, initially appointed for three years, comprises the Chairman, five members representing employers, five representing employees and eight scientific or medical specialists.

Advice Centres

The National Consumer Council has just published a Directory of Independent Advice Centres compiled by the Community Information Project. The Directory sheds new light on the nature of these services in the UK which, although they often operate on a shoestring, offer a vital service to a great many people. It is broken down into regional areas and should be a valuable reference book. Copies obtainable from: The National Consumer Council, 18 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AA. Price £4 inc. p & p.

Dispensing of glasses

The new Government policy on dispensing and fitting of glasses has been met with many reservations. The Federation of Optical Corporate Bodies in its newsletter Insight makes heavy use of quotes from various CHCs, including Central Birmingham and Cambridge. While members may not agree with what all the interested bodies have to say, the report, A Dubious Bargain by Judy Kirby, makes interesting reading. It is available from FOCB, Strode House, 44 Osnaburgh Street, London N.W.1.

Charting Welfare Benefits and Mental Health Law

The Royal College of Nursing has sponsored a Health and Benefits Chart for 1984 which Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is circulating. The new poster gives easy-to-read information about what people in certain situations can expect in the way of health and support benefit. It comes with a leaflet giving more detailed information to help see people through the jungle of form filling. The chart and leaflet are aimed at the people many official publications do not seem to reach. Obtainable from CPAG Publications, 1 Macklin Street, London WC2B 5NH. Price £1 inc. p & p.

MIND's new Wallchart on the Mental Health Act 1983 gives instant information on civil and criminal detention and appeals. Obtainable from MIND Bookshop, 155 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 3EF. Price £1.20 inc. p & p.

NHS Training

The National Health Service Training Authority (NHSTA) which has now been in existence for six months, has produced a paper*, compiled by its Chief Executive, Bob Dearden on what has been achieved so far and what needs to be done. NHSTA believes that if it is to develop sensible and sensitive policies, roles and strategies in support of the NHS, the Service must be given the chance to offer its views and comments. NHSTA would welcome replies on a number of issues and comments dealt with in the paper.

* Investing in People - The Future is available from NHSTA, Royal Eye Hospital Annexe, Waterloo Road, London SE1 8XG.

FPCs

The publication of the report of the joint working group on collaboration between DHAs and FPCs has just been published*. Launching it, Kenneth Clarke said the time had now come to consider how the new FPCs are to work after Parliament goes ahead with the third reading of the Health and Social Security Bill. The newly appointed Committees will be expected to develop positive policies, be properly accountable to Ministers, Parliament and the general public and must collaborate closely with the DHAs. The report suggests ways in which FPC policies ought to be presented and how collaboration between authorities can be promoted. The most important message is that the new FPCs should broaden and develop their experience and technical capacity.

* Report available from Personnel Division 1D, Room 515, Eileen House, 80-94 Newington Causeway, London SE1 6EF.

"Home life: a code of practice for residential care". Report of a Working Party sponsored by the DHSS and convened by the Centre for Policy on Ageing. 114 pp. £2.50 p & p inc. From Bailey Brothers & Swinfen Ltd., Warner House, Folkestone, Kent CT19 6PH.

Notes from CHCs

Consultation and Closures

Hammersmith and Fulham CHC has received a copy of an interesting letter from the DHSS to the DHA. In opposing the closure of a number of beds in Charing Cross Hospital, the CHC declined to propose alternative cuts to achieve the necessary savings but instead spelled out objections to cuts in the NHS, stated that the Minister was unlikely to uphold its opposition since he was carrying out Government policy and pointed out that the CHC had not been given the necessary detailed information about the use of beds to enable it to make informed proposals, even had it wished to do so. Until now, says the CHC, "we had always assumed that objections from the CHC which were not accompanied by alternative 'savings' proposals would simply be set aside and not even sent to the RHA or DHSS."

The DHSS letter notes that the DHA is right in drawing attention to the "apparent requirement" for the CHC to submit a constructive and detailed counter-proposal where it wishes to register its objection to changes but "the circular also draws attention to the fact that Ministers may in other circumstances wish to approve the closure or change of use proposals and they have made it clear on many occasions that ministerial approval is required in every case" (our italics) "where the CHC objects to the proposals". The letter goes on to quote a Written Answer from Kenneth Clarke on December 7, 1983 which stated, without equivocation, that a ministerial decision will be required before a closure can take place every time a CHC objects, although failure to submit counter proposals would seriously weaken its case.

Princess Anne opens Weston CHC's Exhibition

The members of Weston Community Health Council can congratulate themselves on a remarkable achievement when Princess Anne opened their "Aids to Living" Exhibition on May 8. This is the fourth such exhibition Weston has organised and growing interest has meant the need for larger premises. This year the Exhibition was held in the town's Winter Gardens and displayed the many aids, some quite inexpensive, which are available to enhance the quality of life for those who are elderly or handicapped. Aids range from long-handled shoe horns or tea trays with a central handle to mobile staircases and wheelchairs which can climb steps. Manufacturers and suppliers responded well to the CHC's invitation to participate and many voluntary organisations were also represented.

Fluoridation

Aberconwy CHC feels that this should be considered as a major national issue in the next year and Northallerton, which has a Study Group working on fluoridation, would like to know how other CHCs feel about "this kind of mass medication" before legislation is introduced.

Optical Dispensing Services

Canterbury and Thanet CHC has written to Norman Fowler conveying the CHC's concern at the implications of the Health and Social Security Bill about the withdrawal of the

above services from the NHS with the exception of certain exempted persons. The CHC lists a number of queries including - How will the Secretary of State exercise control to ensure unregistered persons do not supply spectacles without a recent prescription? What protection will be given to the public (other than legal redress) who are supplied with spectacles by unregistered persons? What monitoring powers are proposed and how much will this cost? What price and quality control and complaints mechanism will operate for the supply of ophthalmic lenses? On the question of cost, the CHC asks if the public will be expected to pay more than under the present arrangements and if the Secretary of State believes that in order to remain viable, opticians will have to increase their charges, the simple low-price work having been taken over by retail traders.

Charging for certificates or evidence for Supplementary Benefit Claims

East Birmingham CHC has now received clarification from Birmingham Family Practitioner Committee, following its queries about doctors who have been charging for these documents. This has resulted in a letter being sent to all GPs on the FPC's medical list setting out clearly their responsibilities under the Terms of Service. It notes that some doctors "possibly unwittingly, are charging patients for providing certificates in circumstances that they should not be and are, therefore, in breach of their Terms of Service. This is causing concern to the patients, the Committee, the CHCs and some of the Advice Centres who assist patients". The FPC encloses a detailed list of prescribed medical certificates and finally tells doctors that if they have charged patients for certificates inappropriately, "you may feel it advisable to make reimbursement...". East Birmingham doubts the problem is of only local significance and hopes that other FPCs can be encouraged to contact their own GPs likewise.

Deputation to Minister

After strong protests when Health Minister, Kenneth Clarke, refused to meet a deputation from Waltham Forest protesting at NHS cuts, he finally agreed to see a group made up of members of the local authority, the CHC, Local Medical Committee, Hospital Consultants Association and three local MPs all asking for adequate funding for local health services. The Minister only gave a week's notice of his change of mind and the CHC had to prepare a paper in haste arguing that the Borough has high levels of social deprivation which go unrecognised and that the health service is fully stretched now with no chance of escaping the damaging effect of cuts. It argued that, in fact, the district had suffered disproportionately large cuts. However, having discussed the matter with the deputation for an hour, the Minister refused to concede the arguments and insisted that Waltham Forest was an over-provided district and should take a reduction although he would bear their views in mind. Waltham CHC points out that Whipps Cross hospital is one of the cheapest and most efficient in the Region but, despite this, it is going ahead with a two week closure to routine work this summer. It is estimated that with 2000 less out-patients, 190 less inpatients and 4 wards closed, there will be a saving of just £50,000....

Joint Consultative Committees

Rochdale CHC is concerned, following information from Rochdale Voluntary Action which acts as voluntary service co-ordinator, that the voluntary sector members of the JCC cannot be elected this May as the House of Commons has not yet considered the appropriate circular. Even if the election does finally take place, then those elected will not take their places until January 1985. The CHC is also concerned that the accountability of these representatives have not been given sufficient thought, many of them being still fairly ignorant of the role the JCCs will have in co-ordinating the switch to care in the community. Like many other CHCs, Rochdale points out that this major policy change is to be introduced when the ability of the various services to cope with an increased burden has not been assessed, no programme for expanded community care has been properly costed or studied and when the fledgling JHCPTs have hardly got off the ground. Rochdale finds the implications of it all disturbing with policy and related financial decisions being taken at high levels, based on untested and as yet unconsidered assumptions. Meanwhile within the JCCs, the crucial forum which should be debating the proposals and producing the ideas about what is, or is not, feasible, there is now a yawning vacuum. By January 1985 the cuts in patient care will already be decided and revenue and capital assumptions approved by the Treasury. At the end of the day the voluntary and joint sector will be overloaded by a demand they cannot meet and patients may suffer.

Well Womens Centres

Waltham Forest CHCs survey on the need for this service has produced such a good response and so many queries that they are holding an open meeting to discuss the subject on June 21 at Ross Wyld Hall, Church Hill, Walthamstow at 7.30 p.m.

The Norwich Health Authority has agreed to a three year pilot scheme for a Well Woman Clinic, during which period its use will be carefully monitored. Norwich CHC is delighted as it first presented its proposals to the Authority in April 1982. Details of this achievement, plus the result of a survey carried out by Norwich of such provision (or lack of it) through other CHCs, is given in a paper produced by Norwich CHC's Working Group. Norwich achieved a 78% response from the 255 CHCs circulated. The paper is obtainable from Norwich CHC, 15 Unthank Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 2PA.

The Primary Health Care Project 1981-83, jointly sponsored by Newcastle CHC and the Inner City Forum, has just published a colourful 120 page report "WHAT WE NEED IS...", the views of women on their health and health services. Obtainable from Inner City Forum, Mea House, Ellison Place, Newcastle, NE1 8XS. Price £1.50 plus 70p p & p.

CHC Response

Bromley CHC has produced an exceptionally detailed and wide-ranging survey and report in response to the Health Authority's document on proposed changes in the provision of health services. The CHC notes that consideration of that document was "the most difficult and painful exercise this CHC has ever had to undertake". The CHC has

already made its own feelings on the reduction of revenue allocation known. Criticisms of lack of long-term planning by the HA have been found to be justified by Bromley CHC and this is gone into in depth. The Report also looks at individual hospitals, raising objections to the proposals and offers alternatives too, hospital by hospital. The CHC had set up a working group back in September in anticipation of the Authority's consultation document and it has worked continuously since and has taken advice from a large number of professional bodies and from individuals, including four MPs. Quite an achievement.

Community Mental Health Services

Paddington and North Kensington CHC has produced a paper on the above subject for wide circulation within its area. It is designed as a contribution to planning for mental health in the District and the CHC points out its views have developed in the context of major changes in hospital provision. The paper looks into Service Provision, the Needs of Particular Client Groups, Mental Health in a Multi-Ethnic Society and ends with Evaluation.

Subsequent to our note in the last SCN on Hertfordshire FPC's decision to restrict CHC questions to those given in writing, the FPC has changed its mind presumably, says N.W. Herts CHC, "as a result of the Hertfordshire CHC's actions". Now CHC Observers can ask questions at an FPC meeting resulting from items on the Agenda or from discussion at the meeting. If the CHC Observer wishes to raise an issue which does not appear on the Agenda, then the CHC must submit the question in writing to the relevant sub-committee for consideration and then to the next FPC meeting under the sub-committee's report.

Transport and Information

East Cumbria has just published a repeat survey of transport needs in one of the largest health districts in the county (the first was conducted in 1976) and a Handbook of Information for Older People which looks very official but is easy to read. The survey was based on the model developed by South Cumbria CHC.

Coming Soon.....

"From Hospital to Home" - a national nursing study conference and exhibition, 25-27th September, Imperial College, London. Presented by Nursing Times.

"Maternity Care - the Last Five Years" with the Minister of Health, a Maternity Alliance AGM Open Meeting; 27 June at National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley St., London EC1.

"Life After Mental Illness? Opportunities in an age of Unemployment". MIND Annual Conference 1984, 22-23rd October.

Silver Jubilee Conference. The Richmond Fellowship for Mental Health and Rehabilitation is holding its Silver Jubilee International Conference on Mental Health and the Community in the Institute of Education's Logan Hall at London University on July 16 to 18. Speakers will include Professor Anthony Clare, J.H. Henderson of WHO, Professor

T.S. Szasz of the State University of New York and Jean Vanier of L'Arche Communities in France. In addition to plenary sessions there will be special interest group discussions to examine specific topics relevant to delegates. Further details obtainable from: The Conference Manager, 8 Addison Road, London W.14.

MENCAP has announced the programme for its Mental Handicap Week Conference on June 26 at the Purcell Room, Royal Festival Hall, London SE1. It will be chaired by Brian Rix CBE, and speakers will include Dr. James Hogg, Judy Sebba, Fred Heddell, Alan Kendall, Jean Willson, Shirley Bentley and Malcolm Jones. It will be opened by Lord Allen of Abbeydale GCB. Details and credentials from: Rolf Hermelin, MENCAP, 123 Golden Lane, London EC1.

Fit for the Future. On June 21, in Harrogate, Harrogate CHC is holding a public meeting at the Assembly Rooms to focus awareness on all aspects of Child Health. Speakers include a consultant paediatrician, a GP, the District Medical Officer and topics will include preventive health as well as caring for sick children. It will be followed by a question and answer and discussion session.

DHSS

A DHSS leaflet on Complaints about Family Doctor Services is about to be published. As some members have asked, ACHCEW was consulted about a text at an early stage but individual CHCs were not approached. We have not seen a final draft.

Deputising Services Sub-Committee: CHCs Out!

"It is not felt that it would be appropriate for a CHC member or observer to attend meetings of the sub-committees. This would raise problems of confidentiality in relation to individual doctors and would tend to blur the distinction between management and representation which is an important feature of the reorganised NHS. However, statutory responsibility for consenting to the use of deputising services by GPs and for periodically reviewing such consents will continue to rest with FPCs and the sub-committees will be expected to submit an annual report to FPCs. It will be for FPCs to establish a local policy on the use of deputising services and to keep that policy under review. It is hoped that through their observer status on FPCs and in other ways CHCs will contribute to the debate about such a policy and bring their valuable experience to bear. "

Artificial Limb and Appliance Centres (ALACs)

CHCs are asked for views on improving services to patients. Suggestions on "increasing cost effectiveness and securing better 'value for money' will be especially welcome". A small working party has been established under the Chairmanship of Professor Ian McColl. Written evidence before 17 August to Secretariat to the ALAC Review, DHSS, 14 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EP.

Just Published

30th May: The Mallinson Report on "The Future of Psychiatric Services. A useful analysis which owes much to the forgotten Nodder Report on the Management of Psychiatric Hospitals and which clearly favours NHS domination of more integrated service. Published by COHSE, Glen House, High Street, Banstead, Surrey SM7 2LH.

31st May: Cost Containment in Health Care: A study of 12 European Countries 1977-83 by Brian Abel-Smith published by Bedford Square Press/NCVO; price £5.95.

The author of the report suggests NHS cuts in this country are based upon media myths.

"As presented in the media, the history of the NHS over the past five years has been one of successive cuts, increased charges and long queues for vital services," Professor Abel-Smith says. "In practice, however, the cuts have largely been in previously planned levels of growth, particularly when the assumptions about price increases which underlie cash limits have proved to be too low. Overall spending on the NHS has increased considerably. While charges, particularly for drugs, have gone up more than inflation, no new charges have been introduced."

Rural Health

Over 100 members of CHCs, Rural Community Councils, WIs and other groups attended the highly successful conference on 30th May organised in cooperation with ACHCEW by Rural Voice. There was wide agreement on the health service problems faced by rural communities, valuable sharing of information (e.g. surveys and an illuminating report on the Rural Dispensing Committee in its first year), and much stress on good practice and new ideas. A report will be published by Rural Voice. Closer collaboration between rural organisations, shared services and joint surveys or publications, more regional meetings on the same pattern as this first national conference - these are just some of the suggestions made in the discussions.

Legal Update Services

Note for Subscribers only

You will find 6 issues enclosed with this Standing Committee News. We apologise for the format, which is due to technical and financial problems, but it is the content that matters. These copies complete your subscription order. It seems unlikely that the Service will be resumed but we would welcome comments on its value to you.

ACHCEW is in the process of disposing of the lease for its present offices. We expect to move out soon. Where to, we do not know, but we shall inform member CHCs of any changes as soon as possible.