



# the columns

## correspondence

### The award of Membership without examination

Professor Khan raised the issue of award of Membership of the College without examination terming it as 'through the back door' (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, January 2006, **30**, 3–5). Although he has raised some pertinent issues and some of his objections appear to be valid it was not fair to generalise and include everybody in the same category. The award of Membership without examination broadly falls into two categories. One is to psychiatrists of international eminence and the other is to international fellows recruited under the International Fellowship Programme (IFP).

Most international fellows from Pakistan possess the fellowship (FCPS), which according to Professor Khan's own description, 'is difficult and requires consistent hard work, application and discipline'. FCPS is an exit exam and candidates do not require further training to become eligible for senior positions in psychiatry. Psychiatrists who have been appointed to consultant posts via the IFP have had a series of interviews, including a formal interview by a panel which has included a College representative.

We strongly disagree with Professor Khan's opinion that it was a back door entry to Membership for these psychiatrists. The Dean's response to the article was apologetic. It was disappointing that rather than addressing the main issue of award of Membership to those of 'international eminence', he dwelt on international fellows. The College has already suspended the processing of applications of international recruits, who can no longer become members despite having equivalent qualifications, being on the General Medical Council specialist register, having the certificate of completion of specialist training (CCST), Specialist Training Authority approval, experience of training senior house officers in psychiatry for the Membership exam, registering for continuing professional development and above all despite being promised Membership by the College authorities.

We were surprised by the statement from the Dean that international fellows were 'seduced by the promise of

MRCPsych by people who have had no power to make such promises' (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, January 2006, **30**, 6). If the President, Deputy Dean and the Head of Education of the College had no authority, then why did they seduce the international fellows at the crucial stage of recruitment? Membership was viewed as a major incentive by many of the candidates. They now feel cheated and betrayed by the College.

#### Declaration of interest

Both authors came to the UK under the International Fellowship Programme from Pakistan. They take pride in developing a close association with the College. One author was conferred the Membership under Section III 2(ii) of the Bye-Laws in 2004 but the other was recently refused Membership as a result of legal advice relating to Section III 2(ii).

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I read with interest the debate about the International Fellowship Programme and the award of Membership without examination. As a psychiatrist returning to my home country I would like to share some views on these issues.

There is a shortage of psychiatrists in countries such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka but a large number of doctors trained in these countries work as psychiatrists in high-income countries. However, this situation existed long before the International Fellowship Programme came into being. As long as there is a shortage of psychiatrists in high-income countries and free movement of doctors for employment is permitted, this 'exodus' will continue.

The postgraduate training programme in Sri Lanka is unique in that it requires 1 year of compulsory senior registrar training overseas, prior to obtaining certification as a consultant. Of the trainees who passed the MD Psychiatry examination and proceeded overseas, only about a quarter have returned to Sri Lanka. Thus the larger loss in Sri Lanka is of trainees and not consultants.

Many accusations have been levelled at the Fellowship Programme for offering

attractive packages to lure experienced psychiatrists to the UK. It could also be viewed as providing opportunities for those who choose to work under difficult circumstances in low- and middle-income countries to experience working in a different system and reap financial benefits.

The recognition of equivalent qualifications and the granting of membership of professional organisations occurs in many professions. This has enabled skilled professionals to work in different countries without having to repeat their basic training. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has been quite conservative in the recognition of equivalent qualifications compared with some of the other Colleges. For example, overseas graduates who hold a postgraduate diploma which is recognised by the Royal College of Physicians and which requires a comparable period of training may be permitted to enter the MRCP(UK) part 2 written examination with exemption from the MRCP(UK) part 1 examination and without the need for further training (<http://www.mrcpuk.org>). The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists also grants exemption to psychiatrists who have qualified overseas, dependent on their training and experience (<http://www.ranzcp.org>).

Those who obtain the MRCPsych by examination do undergo good training and work very hard to obtain the qualification. However, this does not mean that training programmes in other countries are necessarily inferior in quality.

If the College decides to continue to award MRCPsych without examination, it needs to develop clear criteria on how applications are reviewed and publish these criteria so that applicants are clear about the expected standards. The equivalence guidelines of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists are ones that the College would do well to emulate (Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2004).

#### Declaration of interest

V.d.S. worked as a consultant psychiatrist in the UK under the Fellowship Programme. She applied for MRCPsych under Bye-Law Section III 2(ii) in 2005.