

The College

Secretarial and support services for hospital, medical and dental staff

The College continues to receive concerned communications from members about secretarial and administrative support provided by the NHS for them and for the services in which they work.

The most frequent problems raised are difficulties of recruiting and retaining secretarial staff and those of ensuring that each consultant and associated professional staff are allocated sufficient secretarial time. In many instances difficulties in recruitment and retention of support staff are severe and long-term and related to the low levels of remuneration compared with salaries offered by private companies. This appears to arise most often in the cities where health authorities may be forced to employ temporary agency staff at greater cost. The second problem arises from misunderstanding of the often broad and personally demanding roles of secretaries in mental health services. The progression towards dispersed community orientated psychiatric services and the development of community mental health services increase the importance of the secretary's role and significantly raise the essential allocation of administrative support and secretarial time.

The Public Policy Committee views these reports with concern and is aware of deteriorating morale among secretarial staff in the NHS. The attention of members is drawn to the following document which may prove of assistance in negotiations with health authority managers over support services. *Secretarial and Support Services for Hospital, Medical and Dental Staff* is the report of a DHSS Working Party published by the DHSS in 1987. The Public Policy Committee sees the review of the broad role of secretarial services in this report as helpful. It introduces the concept of 'non clinical support' to describe the main types of service which a clinician may require. These include secretarial, personal assistant, communication, data collection and validation func-

tions. The report considers the workload, training and development of support staff as well as their organisation, recruitment, management and career structure. It makes recommendations for the future including the flexible use of those gradings then available.

The College is informed that this report was commended to health authorities by the DoH but is concerned that the DoH indicated that authorities would need to make their own assessment of priorities from its recommendations.

In July 1989 a major restructuring of pay and grades for all A & C staff was agreed. The DoH has indicated that this had, in part, been designed to give management greater flexibility in grading and paying A & C staff. A new facility to enable managers to award local pay supplements where labour market factors cause difficulties in recruitment and retention is included in the new arrangements. Notification of the 1989 restructure and pay increases and of a new rate of allowance applicable to certain staff of Regional Secure Units is contained in DoH Advance Letter (AC) 9/89. Details are contained in the revised pages for the A & C Whitley Council Handbook attached to the letter.

The College has been informed by DoH that, under these new conditions, managers may now make substantial supplementary payments to medical secretaries where it is felt that local pay rates demand this and that such supplements could amount to as much as 30% on top of a secretary's salary in the Thames Regions and 20% outside the Thames Regions.

The College will be drawing the attention of its Regional Advisers to the continuing need to ensure that adequate secretarial arrangements are specified in the job descriptions for new and replacement consultant posts.

Approved by Council, March 1990

The Library

We are considering the possibility of developing a limited Library service for members of the College who are blind or partially so. To assist us in ascer-

taining the level of demand, could those interested kindly contact Susan Floate, Librarian.