

29 August 2007

Professor Peter Rubin
Postgraduate Medical Education
and Training Board
Hercules House
Hercules Road
London SE1 7DU

Dear Professor Rubin,

I am writing to express my serious concerns about the continuing difficulties in communications with PMETB and more specific issues to do with quality assurance of training programmes and training.

Following the approval of our curriculum and assessment programme, I wrote to PMETB in January 2007 to clarify the status of special interest days and research/study days in the context of new curriculum for advanced trainees. In spite of repeated reminders to date, we have had no response. As a result the Education, Training and Standards Committee of this College had to revisit the original decision thereby creating further confusion not only for trainees but also for tutors and other stakeholders. As you can appreciate, with the ongoing mayhem in training early and clear responses are required.

However, my main concern remains the quality assurance issue. For over 3 decades this College has led the way in raising standards in training nationally and internationally through clearly identified approval processes of training, trainers and training posts. Since PMETB took over this role, these standards appear to be vanishing fast. As you are aware, mental health trusts are separate from acute trusts and the standards need to be pushed up not down but the trainee and trainer feedback from all parts of the country since PMETB took over the approval process clearly indicates a loss of the high training standards within our specialty. Whilst acknowledging PMETB's desires to be a light touch regulator, I feel that this is a dangerous approach given the current financial climate of the NHS where training is clearly the lowest priority for healthcare organisations. The validity of the current PMETB approach is even more questionable given that all the planned processes for Quality Assurance do not seem to be fully in place yet.

I would like to substantiate my concerns with some examples. Our attention has been drawn to the recent instances where staff grade posts have been approved for training without any formal consideration or modification of the job plan, resulting in these jobs becoming service jobs rather than training

jobs. We are, however, being routinely told that these posts have received PMETB approval further raising our level of concern as some of these posts would never have been approved for training under the College approval system. We have also been made aware that ST4 jobs in some places are not being seen as equivalent to SpR first years thereby, creating a major discrepancy in training opportunities. There is also evidence emerging that trainees in advanced training (ST4-ST6) are now being asked routinely to act down. The paperwork coming from PMETB appears to be inadequate and incorrect at times.

It appears that the robust quality assurance procedures which were in place prior to PMETB coming into existence have been or are being washed away by less robust quality assurance. The trainees' surveys have produced generic views but not robust external review. It has also become clear that the Royal College's views appear to be ignored and we would like PMETB to bring back more robust external quality assurance process run by the College.

My forlorn hope with the advent of PMETB was that this new body will bring Postgraduate Medical Education in the 21st Century but it appears that we are being drawn into the dark days of the 18th Century.

I would like clear assurances supported by evidence from PMETB that standards of training in Psychiatry are not being dumbed down and that 30 years of hard work of this College and its Members is not being lost. I am not sure how this College can support applications for CCT if we have no confidence in the approval process.

I look forward to your comments.

With best wishes

Professor Dinesh Bhugra
Dean
Royal College of Psychiatrists

cc Dr Paul Streets, Chief Executive, PMETB
Mrs Vanessa Cameron, Chief Executive, Royal College of Psychiatrists
Professor Sheila Hollins, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists
Professor Sue Bailey, Registrar, Royal College of Psychiatrists
Dr Amit Malik, Chair, Psychiatric Trainees Committee