

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSE

Remit

1. The primary role of the SCHR is to advise the President, Officers and Central Executive Committee of the College on matters relating to human rights and mental health. Consequently, in relation to the outside world any significant contributions to debates would be made following consultation with the President.
2. While the term 'human rights' derives from national and international legal concepts we propose to make use as well of good custom and practice to the advantage of the mentally ill. The Committee is concerned with the rights and freedoms central to the enjoyment of life as applied to those suffering from, or at risk of developing, a mental disorder.
3. The Committee is conscious of the need to address primarily human rights nationally, including the European dimension. However, the Committee will also be responsive to requests for advice.

Procedure

4. The Committee aims to be an active one, making significant demands on its members' time with activities between meetings. To fulfil its remit the Committee's members must possess sufficient knowledge and expertise in the field of human rights.
5. The Committee believes it will achieve little by way of effective action unless it meets frequently and it aspires to meet approximately ten weekly.
6. The Committee values a small group size for effective working and aims to limit co-option of members to a time limited basis for specific purposes. Exceptions to this would be the co-option of a representative user and a trainee.
7. This is an evolving document and will be reviewed annually.

Work Aims

8. The Work Plan of the Committee will be reviewed annually.
9. The work of the Committee will be broadly divided into three streams, Educational, Proactive and Reactive work, and will be focussed in three broad areas:

(a) Within the College

10. The Committee regards a close working relationship with the Policy Unit and the Press Office in the College as important for effective working.

11. The Committee has sought to develop channels of communication with the faculties and will consider developing links with the divisions at a later stage.

12. The Committee will maintain a watching brief on the adequacy of attention given to human rights in College policies on training and education.

13. The Committee regards it as a priority of the College to support its members to maintain adequate human rights standards for patients especially in difficult circumstances, such as inadequately resourced services.

(b) Within the College membership

14. The College recognises that the professional responsibilities and competencies of psychiatrists are not identical to other members of the multi-disciplinary team. The Committee aims to assess any deficits in human rights training for psychiatrists before suggesting remedies or undertaking training initiatives itself.

15. The Committee is also concerned about the human rights of psychiatrists, within the UK and internationally, who draw attention to the shortcomings of the mental health service delivered to their patients and in so doing may put their professional livelihood or even their physical safety in jeopardy.

16. There is increasing awareness of the Human Rights Act among mental health professionals. The Committee aims to contribute to the literature and educational material to increase knowledge of human rights in psychiatry.

(c) Beyond the College

17. The Committee seeks to establish limited direct links to external bodies including the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

18. The Committee intends to pursue the clarification of standards of services in human rights terms. It intends to investigate liaison with the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture, which has developed standards applicable in various settings including police stations, psychiatric hospitals and prisons.

19. The Committee is aware of the importance of applying human rights standards in the community as well as in institutional care. The Committee is sensitive to possible harm caused by compulsory in-patient care, especially if it is prolonged. It is also concerned about the psychiatric morbidity among refugee detainees as well as among the small number of terrorist law detainees.

Nov 2008.