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Solitary Confinement

SIR,—In the *Evening News* of 16 October there was a pathetic picture of an 18-year-old girl on the roof of Holloway Prison, and the photograph was accompanied by two statements. One, that she had been sentenced to 30 days' solitary for a previous episode of similar behaviour, and the other, that a doctor advised hospital treatment, "so that the sentence probably would mean 30 days of 'complete segregation' in the prison hospital." Apart from wondering in general about the archaic system of solitary confinement, one might also feel that hospital treatment and complete segregation are mutually incompatible activities. They certainly are in terms of modern psychiatry.

I am sure we have all welcomed the release of the Reuter's correspondent, Mr. Anthony Grey, from Chinese hands, and have read with horror of the mental torture that is involved in such solitary confinement. It must be with great disquiet that we read of similar confinement of the mentally sick in this country. The prisoner needs, we are told, "hos-

pital treatment."

One can ask is this humane, as well as, is this effective? Clearly it is not the latter, as this is the second episode. On the former point I do not believe it is possible to answer in the affirmative. Is it not time our prison service abandoned punishment and substituted treatment and rehabilitation?

We have a number of very archaic prisons in Britain, and society must provide the money to give these prisoners adequate accommodation and greater freedom. Tolerance of inhumanity at any point in the system contaminates us all. Many Germans claimed they did not know what was happening in their prison camps. Fortunately, through press vigilance, we cannot claim this ourselves.—We are, etc.,

GEOFFREY GRAY,
Chairman,

P. A. L. CHAPPLE,
Medical Director,
National Addiction and Research Unit,
London S.W.3.

G.M.C. Proposals

SIR,—I question whether there is any need at all further to subdivide the profession by a vocational register.

Evidence of good experience and higher qualifications is required of any applicant for a senior specialist post; and to include a specialized register of general practitioners is a self-evident ridiculousness.

Let us by all means have further opportunity for postgraduate training and revision courses; but let us not thereafter spend anybody's money on unnecessary administration. We are sufficiently administered now.—I am, etc.,

Rothsay, Bute.

A. N. CLAPHAM.

SIR,—The B.M.A. is to be congratulated on immediately taking appropriate action to forestall amending legislation to the Medical Acts (*Supplement*, 18 October, p. 11) which might by its improper haste result in "bad law," which would affect every member of the medical profession practising in this country.

There would appear to be needed a much fuller inquiry into the future constitution and activities of the General Medical Council, presumably by the setting up of a Royal Commission. There would also have to be considered the position if this country joined the Common Market. Supposing the regis-

tration system envisaged by the G.M.C. was not acceptable to the other European countries—is the Government of the day going to guarantee a return of any annual levies which we shall have paid under this new proposed scheme?

There are a lot of questions to be answered before the medical profession can commit itself to legislation, and it is to be hoped for the sake of junior doctors and medical students that they are not subjected to such restrictions that they will find it a burden to practise in Britain in the future.—I am, etc.,

Mangotsfield, Glos.

T. D. RICHARDS.

SIR,—I write in support of the letters of Mr. R. S. Murley and Mr. J. J. Shipman (18 October, p. 166). I was horrified to learn that we are literally on the threshold of major changes—that is, vocational registration, specialty boards and registration, annual fees, etc., without the profession generally being aware of what is going on.

It is suggested that the vocational registration for general practitioners would take place six years after graduation and will include three or more compulsory years in hospital and two compulsory years in general practice. I, for one, am unalterably opposed to supporting this, and thus committing future generations of doctors, until and unless a full referendum has been conducted and a two-thirds majority secured for its implementation. I have little reason to doubt that (a) it gives the Government greater control over the profession generally, and (b) it provides a continuing, and probably cheap, source of labour for the Hospital Service and for general practice. I would suggest that the B.M.S.A. should oppose such compulsion to the bitter end.

Except for a few general-practitioner hospitals, which the Government is doing its best