Reliability and validity of HoNOS

Sir: We looked in vain for evidence of the statement by Chaplin & Perkins (Psychiatric Bulletin, January 1999, 23, 20-21) that their study had assessed the reliability and validity of the pre-final version of the Health of the Nation Outcome Scales (HoNOS). The first claim relates to a comparison of the scores of 32 (out of 248) patients interviewed either by a psychologist, psychiatrist or by a nurse. What they call a lack of reliability seems to be large difference in the mean total scores (15.6 and 6.4 respectively). In a second comparison involving only eight patients, similar mean total scores (13.75 and 14.25) were obtained by nurses rating independently of each other. It is impossible to interpret these figures without knowing, in substantial detail, how the study was carried out.

In the equivalent study of the pre-final HoNOS during the field trials (further details available from the authors upon request), there was a small by significant difference between nurses (n=399) and psychiatrists (n=60), probably reflecting differences between the settings (acute longer term and community) where the ratings took place there was a much larger difference between clinicians and social workers, which appeared to be associated with different rating thresholds, indicating as other studies have done a problem of calibration between professions.

So far as we can tell, no trial of 'validity' was carried out by the authors.

A further incidental but important point relates to terminology. The formulation "HoNOS rated half with hallucinations..." is inadmissible. HoNOS is not a person. The clinicians rated HoNOS. We do strongly agree with the recommendation that training should be supplemented by supervision, as emphasised in the HoNOS documentation.

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Police management of dangerous patients

Your special article 'Police training for the management of dangerous patients' (Psychiatric Bulletin, January 1999, 23, 46-48) raises a number of questions. National Schizophrenia Fellowship members recognise that police are in the front-line, not through choice but as a result of the resource and planning falling associated with care in the community. They remain the only service that can be relied upon to turn up at any time of the day or night when called.

However, the Police Complaints Authority and Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Condon, among others, now recognise what the National Schizophrenia Fellowship has been saying for years, that police training in dealing