The Value of a Joint Professional Approach

DISCUSSION GROUP B

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The Benefits

The group considered that a multi-professional team (consisting of a medical practitioner, a child care officer and a police officer) approach offers the following benefits:

• it reduces the necessity for a multiplicity of interviews;

• roles and the developing of networks;

• it provides a structure for shared decision making, responsibility and accountability;

• it breaks down barriers between different professionals and agencies;

• it allows an acceptance of the goals of each profession/agency and a cooperative approach to achieve these;

• it supplies both moral and professional support for the professionals involved; and

• it allows for greater maximisation of resources.
What are the Difficulties?

Possible difficulties which could be encountered may include:

- the different approaches of professionals from various agencies;
- the unavailability of appropriate personnel in country areas;
- the absence of a commitment to a team approach from each department; and
- a constant change of staff which may limit team building.

Suggestions

It was suggested that:

- there is an urgent need for joint professional training of all personnel at both postgraduate and at a practical level. Team training should include, for example, information on child development, and communicating with children. The Bexley, United Kingdom, style of training was recommended (Child Sexual Abuse Joint Investigative Programme Bexley Experiment, 1987);
- a joint professional approach should be undertaken in conjunction with a concerted community education campaign;
- all professionals working within the criminal justice system, for example doctors, court personnel, teachers, social workers, need to be educated in the cognitive and developmental needs of children;
- adequate funding and resources are necessary if a joint professional approach is to be effective;
- all departments need to have a real commitment to preventing worker 'burn out' rather than accepting it as an inevitable occurrence after a period of time;
- all professionals must accept the importance of the child's needs as being superior to their individual egos;
- there is a need for a national networking of information and experience so that this can be disseminated.