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Central districts special page, every Tuesday

Child psychiatrist in defence of ECT

Claims he was made scapegoat

DR SELWYN LEEKS, of Palmerston North, the child psychiatrist who gave electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) to a 13-year-old Niuean boy at Lake Alice Hospital last year, still believes his decision was the right one.

Dr Leeks, who is to lose his job at the hospital, makes no secret of the fact that he has been "hurt" as a result of the affair.

"I believe I made the right decision for the boy, though the wrong one for myself because it has discredited me in terms of future advancement in New Zealand," he says.

Dr Leeks has been told he must give up his post as psychiatrist in charge of the adolescent unit at Lake Alice by next month. He has been allowed to carry on there till his patients are either discharged or under other care.

However, though he has nothing in writing, he has been told by the hospital authorities that he will be retained as a consultant. Lake Alice is the only psychiatric hospital in New Zealand still administered by the Health Department. All others are now run by local hospital boards.

It was due to Dr Leeks' efforts principally that the adolescent unit ever got off the ground and became as effective as it did.

"I'll finish the term and then step down," he says.

In the last few weeks Dr Leeks has maintained one-third of his child patients for three days a week at Lake Alice for group therapy in which he is a firm believer. The rest of the children have been taken over by three other general psychiatrists.

Till just a few weeks ago Dr Leeks was the director of the Manawatu psychological unit at Palmerston North Hospital, but that post has now been taken over by Dr Mason Durie.

Dr Leeks is looking forward to throwing his main effort into a new total care ward for adolescents — the first of its kind in New Zealand — at Palmerston North Hospital.

Dr Leeks feels he has been made the scapegoat for the Lake Alice affair, and during the magisterial inquiry into the Niuean case took a "staunch" stand in the face of eight hours of intense cross-examination.

He was questioned relentlessly by the Church of Scientology (which is against ECT) and psychiatry, the Accord group at Auckland, the women's division of the Values Party, an officer from the Ombudsman's office, the president of the New Zealand Psychological Association and the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

Dr Leeks was not very impressed with the Ombudsman's report, because, he says, the Ombudsman never spoke to him personally about the affair.

Reporting for The Dominion in Central Districts:
Doug Davies
Michael Holmes

There is a move to use more psycho therapy, and ECT is not being used so readily. Children are responding to either medication or psychotherapy, or both, and there is a need to keep beds turning over at Lake Alice. He prefers to try medication before ECT.

Where someone is deeply handicapped by a burst of ECT will clear the trouble. Dr Leeks admits that ECT is relatively extreme but says it helps cases of autism where a child is likely to do violence to itself or others. It is useful as a treatment where a patient is dangerous.

Dr Leeks regards it as unfortunate that many people

see ECT as punitive, but stresses that he has never used it in that way.

Because of the high skin resistance in some people it is sometimes necessary to give a slightly longer current, but it would never exceed one and-a-half seconds, Dr Leeks says. In general, ECT lasts less than a second and loss of consciousness is immediate. The ECT machine has graduated current.

Dr Leeks says ECT given without an anaesthetic could lead to broken limbs as a result of sudden arching, but with controlled current and when the patient is held adequately, that does not happen.

Dr Leeks has a cardinal rule of explaining what he plans to do with ECT and the effect it will have on a patient.

In the cases of "highly disturbed" patients where there is violence, growling and no English spoken, as in the case of the Niuean boy, communication is virtually impossible. Dr Leeks says he feels that because of the violence which the boy had shown he made the right decision to give that treatment though, on reflecting, he realises now it has affected his personal future.

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Use of ECT treatment has declined because there are fewer psychotic children Dr Leeks says.

There is a sensitive, public relations-conscious Major Duncan of Linton Camp, who is still wondering if there is any justice left in this world.

Last week, he went to Wellington and on his arrival was immediately in hot water from three colonels at Defence Headquarters who demanded to know why the Lions rugby team had to wash in cold water at Timaru because the army had apparently used up all the hot water.

Major Duncan was the manager of the NZ Army Colts team which had played in the curtain raiser at the South Canterbury-Lions match on June 22.

It seems that we (that is the Don Sports section anyway) suggested the army left the Lions without hot water for showers by leaving the taps running.

Major Duncan contends his chaps showered with the South colts and as the South Canterbury Rugby Union had appointed a liaison officer to watch over things in the changing room, it was that union's ultimate responsibility.

He is emphatic his team turned the taps off and there was hot water when they finished and that the team acted responsibly.

The Silver Fern railcar was several hours late leaving Auckland last Tuesday because of union trouble.

When the railcar reached Taihape at 5pm there was a number of rather frustrated and not too amused passengers who heard the Railways persist

Focus on Central

in saying the stop was being made for lunch. At 2pm the passengers had been given sandwiches at Hamilton.

A DEEP depression has centred over a Canadian weather observer and his wife who emigrated to Manawatu about three years ago.

They now find they are struggling to make ends meet and their cup of happiness is not filled either when they have reports from back home that New Zealand, as seen from the Canadian viewpoint is not too well off.

COMPARATIVELY few individual sports clubs can trace an unbroken run of half a century of participation. One such is the Broadway Hockey Club of Palmerston North, which will be holding a reunion during the weekend of September 3 to mark the conclusion of its 50th consecutive season.

Dr Leeks personally gave ECT 12 times at Lake Alice last year. The youngest patient was a nine-year-old who was autistic and making dangerous attacks.

Dr Leeks still believes in ECT where indicated and feels the referral panel system is too clumsy.

Only 15 per cent of the total of disturbed children under 18 in New Zealand are ever seen and assessed, he says.

And even more disturbing is the fact that at least 10 per cent of New Zealand children out of every one million population show marked signs of mental and emotional stress.

At Manawaroa, where Dr Leeks will be focusing most of his attention from now on, more people are being dealt with by referral and less time is being spent by the staff in going out to the community.

Ideally, he sees the servicing of smaller areas as the most desirable, but all over New Zealand cuts have been made and even two more child psychiatric units for Auckland have been turned down.

Minister firm on siting of Tech Institute

SECTIONAL interests in Palmerston North are continuing with efforts to whip up a lobby of opposition to the siting of the new Technical Institute across the Manawatu River at Aokautere.

But Education Minister Mr Les Gandar is standing firm on his decision to use land already vested in his ministry rather than purchase expensive land on the opposite side of the city.

Mr Brian Elwood, at the recent opening of the new Manawatu Art Gallery, said: "This building is a good demonstration of non-interference and co-operation. The message is clear for all forms of government in New Zealand — leave people alone to get on with the job."

And that is precisely what should be done now with the Technical Institute. For more than five years conflicting views on the siting have been aired, and the work of building has been unnecessarily delayed.

Mr Gandar has made his stance quite clear.

"I learnt from the late Sir Duncan Stout, a former Massey Council member, that long-term planning is the only effective way to plan and a city should be built round what it already has," he said.

"For one of the first times in his career, he has given full consideration to all views submitted over recent years.

have decided to allow the Technical Institute to be built at Pihikete (Aokautere).

"We too often tend to be short-term planners for the next 20 years. Here I have had a chance to look further ahead in terms of 50 or even 100 years. We have an education belt and we should develop round that rather than follow a town plan."

"We have got to get past the idea of looking at the institute in terms of catering for just a few motor mechanics, see it taking over some of the courses from Massey which are not truly the role of the university, and the institute can become complementary to Massey."

The Palmerston North City Council has challenged the choice site and claims the minister made his decision without prior consultation with the local authorities concerned.

Mr Gandar strongly denies this, and says he has given full consideration to all views submitted over recent years.

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