

South African psychiatrists and the Aversion Project

support groups.

To the Editor: In their review of the South African Society of Psychiatrists (SASOP) during the apartheid years, Gillis and Nash¹ state that there is little evidence of abuse committed by individual members. However, psychiatrists treating soldiers during compulsory military service 'aroused concern'.

The article has a glaring omission, namely the role of South African Defence Force (SADF) psychiatrists in the so-called Aversion Project in which conscripts were subjected to appalling treatment (including electric shock and sex change surgery) to 'cure' homosexuality, drug abuse and allegedly antisocial attitudes. These activities amount to psychiatric mistreatment of the worst order, comparable with abuse in Soviet Russia and China.

The Aversion Project has been documented in detailed submis-

sions to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC), extensive media coverage, and the *SAMI*. After widespread publicity, it is difficult to believe that the authors were unaware of what occurred.

The activities of the psychiatrists involved with the Aversion Project, if indicted, represent professional misconduct of the highest order. Furthermore, it is difficult to believe that as consultants occupying high military (and in one case, academic) rank, they would not have been — and may remain — members of SASOP.

In concluding, the authors state that the Society 'has continued its role as a watchdog'. Until SASOP has investigated, exposed and disciplined those members who perpetuated unparalleled abuse on conscripts, serious questions will remain about the Society's credibility, responsibility and commitment to ethical practice.

PSYCHIA TRY CONFERENCE FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS & GENERAL PRACTICE CONFERENCE

Kramer Building, Middle Campus, University of Cape Town

ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

- The 2-day Psychiatric Conference (**12 CPD points**) will run on Monday 26 and Tuesday 27 January 2004. Topics will be relevant to general practice and will include an ethics session.
- The 3-day General Conference (**18 CPD points**) will run from Wednesday 28 to Friday 30 January 2004. Topics will include endocrinology, ophthalmology, tuberculosis, nephrology, HIV management, genetics, substance abuse, ethics and a group of interesting general topics.

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