



columns

Inquiries After Homicide (Peay, 1996). The work reviewed here reports on an empirical study of the decision-making processes engaged in by psychiatrists (often in their responsible medical officer capacity), approved social workers and Second Opinion Appointed Doctors (SOADs) in connection with the admission, treatment, detention and discharge of detained patients under the Mental Health Act 1983.

A short review cannot do justice to the rich (and sometimes disquieting) material contained in Peay's careful critical analysis. Her 'subjects' consisted of 106 participants; 52 psychiatrists from the Faculty of General and Community Psychiatry Division of the College, 14 SOADs and 40 approved social workers. The study examined whether, given identical case materials, individual and paired decision-makers reached similar decisions about the application or non-application of the law, and, more critically, whatever the nature of the decisions made, how these decisions were justified by the parties

making them' (p. x). Peay's intention (having stated 'that this is an odd book . . . having neither the methodological rigour of a research report, nor the analytical rigour of a scholarly text') was to attempt to recapture the sense of 'anxiety, excitement, curiosity and discovery experienced by those participating in the research' (p. xi).

Three 'manufactured' cases and accompanying videos formed the basis of the research material. These concerned Mr Draper, 'A Case For Admission'; Mr Wright, 'A Case For Discharge'; and Hazel Robinson, 'A Case For Compulsory Treatment'. The manner in which the mental health professionals in her sample reached their decisions is described in meticulous and fascinating detail. Significantly, one of the major findings concerned the confusion demonstrated by a number of the professionals about the correct application of the law. Another major finding was the role played by what Peay describes as a 'cautionary' approach to decision-making. Perhaps one of the

most important points made by Peay in her concluding chapter is that 'the research findings should not be judged merely by the nature of the decisions made, but, as importantly, if not more importantly by the reasons the practitioners gave for these decisions'. In her Foreword to the book, Lady Justice Hale (who will be known to many readers in her former academic role as Brenda Hoggett), describes the book as 'fascinating', a statement which I echo wholeheartedly. I think this book is a 'must' for all who are thoughtful about the compulsory powers afforded in the current mental health legislation.

PEAY, J. (1989) *Tribunals on Trial: A Study of Decision-Making Under the Mental Health Act 1983*. London: Clarendon Press.

PEAY, J. (ed.) (1996) *Inquiries after Homicide*. London: Gerald Duckworth.

Herschel Prins University of Loughborough

miscellany

Research study: Felix Post

The Wellcome Trust has granted Dr Claire Hilton a short-term Research Leave award in the History of Medicine to research 'Felix Post (1913–2001) – a biographical study'. Dr Hilton would be most interested to hear from anyone who has memories of Felix Post, who may have known him in his early life in Berlin, as a medical student at Bart's, interned on the Isle of Man, as a doctor in the Army, or at any later stages of his career in psychiatry, especially in Edinburgh in the 1940s or at the Maudsley Hospital from 1947–1978. Dr Hilton can be contacted by phone until 31 October 2004 on 07976 768542 or

0208 959 6063; by e-mail (claire.hilton@nhs.net) or by post: Mental Health Service for Older Adults, Mental Health Centre, Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Road, Harrow HA1 3UJ.

Second Opinion Appointed Doctors: Mental Health Act Commission

The Mental Health Act Commission (MHAC) is responsible for the appointment of doctors to undertake the Second Opinions under the powers of Part IV of the Mental Health Act 1983. The Commission invites consultant

psychiatrists of at least 5 years' standing to apply for appointment to its panel of available doctors. There has recently been a significant increase in fees payable to Second Opinion Appointed Doctors. The Commission is particularly looking for doctors in Cumbria; Morecambe Bay; Lancashire; Wales; Gloucestershire; Hampshire; Surrey; Sussex; Kent; Suffolk; and Norfolk. Application forms are available on the Commission's website (www.mhac.trent.nhs.uk) or from the Commission's Office. Applications should be sent to Paramjit Thamu, MHAC, Maid Marian House, 56 Hounds Gate, Nottingham NG1 6BG (e-mail thamup@mhac.trent.nhs.uk; tel 0115 943 7100 ext. 158).

forthcoming events

The Joint Meeting of the Transcultural Special Interest Group and the Faculty of Psychotherapy, Royal College of Psychiatrists will be held on Thursday, 30 September 2004 at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG. For application and programme details, please contact Lisa Kass (e-mail: psychiatry@qmul.ac.uk; tel: 020 7882 7727).

Applications are invited for Semester One of the **MRCPsych Course** run by Univer-

sity College London. **Part I** takes place on Monday afternoons commencing 6 September 2004 and **Part II** takes place on Tuesday afternoons commencing 7 September 2004. The course has been updated in keeping with the Royal College of Psychiatrists syllabus and includes mock exams, theme specific revision sessions, and patient perspectives. For further information and an application form please contact Lydia M. Clinton, the Course Administrator (tel 020 7679 9475; e-mail mrcpsych@ucl.ac.uk).

The University College London Department of Mental Health Services invites applications for a two-year, part-time **MSc in Psychiatric Research** course starting in October 2004. The MSc is intended for senior house officers and specialist registrars in psychiatry. It provides a thorough and very practical training in the research skills relevant to psychiatry. The aim is to equip graduates to do research at doctoral level and apply for research posts in university departments. The first year consists of work-