

have improved it. So would emphasis on the need for support, in particular by the nursing hierarchy, and for training in the management of disturbed old people. Unfortunately, many RGNs lack this because they get little or no experience on psycho-geriatric wards.

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## References

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- <sup>2</sup>ROBBINS, L. J., BOYKOE, LANE, J., COOPER, D. & JAHNIGEN, D. W. (1987) Binding the elderly: a prospective study of the use of mechanical restraints in an acute care hospital. *Journal of the American Geriatric Society*, **35**, 290–296.

**'Goodbye to All That?': Re-thinking the Politics of Mental Health.** Report from the Socialist Health Association, 195 Walworth London SE17 1RP. Pp 20. Price £2.00 (includes postage).

These political thinkers seem to regard psychiatrists, even in Britain, as instruments of the established order, offering palliatives for the effects of an unjust society. Unemployment, poor housing, ethnic and sex discrimination, they argue, are the causes of most distress which we psychiatrists identify as mental illness. They say we have an undue preoccupation with unproven biological theories to justify our proclivity for ECT and drugs rather than psychotherapy. Even psychotherapy in our hands is a little suspect, because too often our methods emphasise individual responsibility rather than social pathology.

In support of their thesis they refer to sources including Hollingshead and Redlich, Brown and Harris, Goldberg and the Black Report: it just shows once again that you can take out of great works whatever you wish.

Besides a change of Government, remedies suggested in this small booklet, produced with the help of ASTMS and NUPE, include re-orientating the professionals by making them more sensitive to consumer views. There, I think, they have a point, and 'the professionals' will certainly agree that community care needs more cash and the planning process needs to be better organised and

responsive to consumer preferences. They favour the Nottingham initiative to set up patients' councils.

One is a little reassured that psychiatrists may still have an important part to play in mental health services. But I must say that if I thought the views expressed about us in this booklet were widely held among the general public I would be proposing that we set up a fund to employ Saatchi & Saatchi to do something about our image.

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## Elsie – a Person of No Importance?

A delightful and moving booklet has been privately printed by Joyce Wilkins, a retired speech therapist who used to teach in the Education Department here in Nottingham. All psychiatrists will enjoy reading it – buy it; I will tell you why.

Elsie Bigge spent the first 52 years of her life in a variety of institutions which included a children's home, then Cane Hill Hospital and finally St Lawrence's Hospital, Caterham. In 1951 Joyce Wilkins with her sister and parents, who were friends of the superintendent, went to collect Elsie; she was to be released 'on licence' as a servant in their home. How she came to be a patient in St Lawrence's you will learn from this account of Elsie's life, pieced together from her own reminiscences. You will read too an account of the 35 years that were the rest of Elsie's life, when she lived happily, enjoying, observing and remarking on the world around her, first as a servant, then in retirement as a family member in the Wilkins' home.

You will wonder why she was in hospital in the first place, and in a sense the story will explain, but in another sense it won't, because there was no good reason. The heroic adaptability with which this woman was able to start a new life in her sixth decade makes this, in jargon, a "success story of community care". In clichés (which this account singularly lacks) it is a period piece, and a little gem. Don't be put off by my clichés, I use them as a brief way to describe this little book, so pleasantly produced and with a delightful cover picture, and to entice you to read it. You can get it by writing to Joyce Wilkins at 6 Davenport Park, Station Road, Heathfield, Sussex TN21 8DR, and sending her £2, which includes postage.

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