malignant or fulminant varieties of catatonia, the use of electroconvulsive treatment is warranted, and at times, lifesaving. Indeed, the association of catatonia with schizophrenia and the automatic administration of neuroleptic drugs is not only rarely helpful but is associated with worsening of the syndrome (Fricchione *et al*, 1983).

This child may have been improperly classified; if so, the prolonged illness and poor outcome may have been avoided by a consideration of this diagnosis and its treatment early in the course.

A full list of references is available from the authros on request.

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Sir: In their letter, Fink & Klein make the interesting diagnostic suggestion that the case we described in our article suffered post-viral encephalitis with residual catatonia. As the case details were only intended to provide sufficient information to illustrate a number of ethical dilemmas, some of the data less relevant to these issues were omitted. Let me provide them now.

First, the child was thoroughly investigated in a neuro-surgical unit before admission to us, and re-assessed by our own neurological department while under my care. No evidence of neurological impairment was detected. Second, the child showed no evidence of specific catatonic features at any time. She had the non-specific feature of double incontinence, but no waxy flexibility or any of the characteristic peculiarities of voluntary movement.

Fink and Klein's therapeutic suggestions are more surprising. This girl recovered from her marked pervasive refusal within three months without medication. Dedicated nursing care was sufficient to achieve this result. Her residual symptoms consisted of extreme anger with her parents and an eating disorder. Benzodiazepines did not seem indicated. The symptoms she showed would surely not have warranted electro-convulsive therapy in an adult, let alone an eight-year-old child.

In our article, we did not provide a DSM–IV diagnosis, and perhaps we should have done, although in my experience, as in that of Leo Kanner, the disorders shown by many children who come to psychiatric attention suggest the children have not read the classification books (Kanner, 1969). I think the least inappropriate diagnosis would have been Conversion Disorder, with Dissociative Disorder as the main differential. As noted in the article however, we preferred to use the 'local' diagnosis of Pervasive Refusal Syndrome (Lask *et al*, 1991) because it is accurately descriptive and carries no unjustifiable aetiological or psychodynamic assumptions.

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The pitfalls of audit for the psychiatric trainee

Sir: Despite being encouraged to spend time on audit, I found this activity to be fraught with difficulties. My experience stems from conducting an audit of patient satisfaction on an acute adult psychiatric ward. Following my first survey, quality standards were agreed on and recommendations for change were made. The survey was repeated one year later, by which time I was working in another district.

The response to the first survey was encouraging, with 50 questionnaires being completed within four months (74% of all patients discharged). But the following year it took five months to get 39 questionnaires completed (41% of all patients discharged) and, half way through the second survey, it became apparent that the majority of patients were being discharged without being given a questionnaire. I resorted to posting questionnaires to the home address of recently discharged patients, rather than abandoning the audit completely. The poor response to the second survey and necessary

https://doi.org/10.1192/pb.19.10.651 Published online by Cambridge University Press