

Book Review

The preceding letter has been shown to the Administrative Secretary Designate of the College, who replies as follows:

Sir,
I was sorry to read Dr D. S. Browne's letter complaining of the treatment he feels he received when attempting to book a reception room.

I find it hard to believe that any of the College staff would have administered a "sharp rebuke" to a member, but should this have occurred, then I must apologise most profusely. A more posi-

tive course would have been for Dr Browne to complain at once to the Administrative Secretary: instant action could then have been taken to clear up any misunderstanding.

Dr Browne's point about the service charge is a good one, although absence of any detail from his letter makes it difficult to comment on this particular case. It is necessary to make a service charge for special bookings if the bar or any other service is required. The College is not staffed to deal with such events on a regular basis, and thus an element of overtime has to be paid to

the domestic staff. It is not felt proper for this charge to fall on the membership as a whole, so it is levied as a service charge on the user.

Future advertisements for College accommodation will mention this, and the fact that children over six may be admitted to reception rooms as well as bedrooms. I am grateful to Dr Browne for drawing attention to these points.

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BOOK REVIEW

PSYCHIATRY IN DISSENT: CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN THOUGHT AND PRACTICE. 2ND EDITION

Anthony Clare

Tavistock Publications Ltd
London (1980)

460 pages. Price £5.25

Once in a while there arrives a book ostensibly on a narrow medical theme but which carries one's thinking beyond the problem of the discipline concerned, out beyond the relationship of Medicine to Society, to a consideration of the human condition itself.

Psychiatry in Dissent is such a book. The author is a senior lecturer at the Institute of Psychiatry and an honorary consultant at the Maudsley Hospital. His stand-point is that of a clinical psychiatrist in active practice surveying the major areas of controversy in his discipline: the feuds, the schisms, the irreconcilable ideologies which so bewilder the onlooker.

The book, though large, does not pretend to be comprehensive; topics such as alcoholism, deviant behaviour, behaviour therapy and the claims of psychoanalysis are not considered in depth. Instead, the author has concentrated on schizophrenia, psychosurgery, electrotherapy and compulsory hospitalization, the crucial contemporary issues which confront psychiatry and, to an increasing extent, the rest of us.

Despite its serious theme this book is most entertainingly written. Dr Clare has a great way with words (thousands

have enjoyed his contributions on the radio) and he writes just as he speaks, his racy, literate style enlivening his grave task. He is a joy to read.

He conducts us skilfully through the tangled thicket of modern psychiatry; the alternative modes of treatment—drugs, psychotherapies and social amelioration (sadly, for the majority of its practitioners these seem to be mutually exclusive, not alternative, approaches); the problems of defining mental illness; the criteria for diagnosing schizophrenia; the proper limits of professional action; the conflict between the 'describers' and the 'analysers', and their tendency (not confined to psychiatrists), of having opted for one approach, to devalue the other.

"Psychiatry in Disarray" might have been a more apt title; for despite the brave face put on it, the impression given is that the psychiatric profession does not really know what it is about, what its proper role should be. Forced to 'conceptualize' in a bid for scientific respectability psychiatrists seem to cling tenaciously to this theory or that, apparently unable to achieve, as we in general practice would like to think we have done, professional pride in being merely craft based.

However, as the title suggests, the most virulent attacks on orthodox psychiatry come from within its own ranks: the passionate 'anti-psychiatry' by the followers of Laing, and the aloof 'non-illness' proclaimed by Thomas Szasz. Are psychiatrists society's "thought police"? Is someone with a bad habit thereby a suitable case for treatment (or 'health education')? Because a person is an invalid, does that render what he

thinks and says invalid? These are some of the difficult questions considered by Dr Clare. He believes there would be less cause for criticism if psychiatrists, particularly in the USA, were more competent in making a proper diagnosis ("a diagnosis incompetently arrived at is more damaging than no diagnosis at all"), but he claims that diagnostic inconsistency is no worse in psychiatry than in general medicine. However, it does appear that the trouble lies more with the profession's sense of values than in the application of diagnostic criteria.

What is clear from Dr Clare's book is that psychiatry is caught in a bind. Having urged their utter medical respectability on the grounds that psychiatry is essentially no different from general medicine, psychiatrists have now to claim that there is a difference which allows them, for instance, to advise and impose medical management not freely sought by the patient.

Of all the dissenters Thomas Szasz seems the one who has most got under the author's skin; he is singled out for vigorous knuckle rapping. Nevertheless, Dr Clare sets out the arguments on the two sides very fairly, even when—to an outside observer at least—that inveterate *enfant terrible* of contemporary psychiatry seems to get the best of the argument. This particular episode provides a fascinating glimpse of the infighting. The subject evidently arouses passions—and psychiatry is nothing if not interpersonal. I hope the Editor will give me Szasz's next book to review.

J. S. NORELL