



psychiatrists, particularly those working in the forensic field. It is, nevertheless, an easily understood, clear overview of the issues in relation to mentally disordered offenders (MDO) in particular and will be of value to those coming newly to the subject.

The introduction to risk as a general concept is interesting, if rather brief, and is followed by sections that review the work of some historically important Government committees, the functions of the mental health review tribunal and parole board, among others, and describe some of the research into the relationship between violence in its various forms, and mental disorder. Professor Prins brings to the book his own experience of working as a member of two inquiries, and describes certain others chosen, by his own admission, in a somewhat arbitrary manner but included in order to illustrate different points. I suspect that any member of the public, with little or no experience of people with mental illness or any form of mental disorder, who reads this will find it the most disturbing section. Why does it seem that the same sort of errors or omissions are made time and time again?

There might, perhaps, have been a more searching and extensive explanation of the difficulties that arise when attempting to equate the aims of mental health professionals and the criminal justice system in dealing effectively with MDOs, although some of these are raised. There is a description of a fictitious case conference and the participants from some of the various different professional groups who might be involved. Although in some places these caricatures may not be so recognisable, regrettably in others they still represent reality.

I was most anxious to reach the part of the book entitled 'Improving Practice'. Initially I found myself somewhat disappointed, but through no fault of the author. In reading about risk assessment and management one can become possessed by the search for revelation and the ultimate answer to the unanswerable question. We are encouraged by much of what we might see that relates to these areas to believe in the Holy Grail of absolute prevention. What Professor Prins does so successfully is to remind us that there is actually no such thing. Our efforts should be focused on maintaining high standards in relation to the basic elements of practice. We should obtain, record and share information, foster good communication and liaison with all those involved and maintain a degree of suspicion within appropriate professional limits, and ask questions accordingly. Perhaps one of the most important messages that we should be seeking to put across is that for some, death, not only their own but regrettably in some cases that of another person,

may be an entirely unpredictable and unpreventable but almost inevitable outcome in certain circumstances.

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Talking cure. Mind and Method of the Tavistock Clinic

Edited by David Taylor. London: Duckworth. 1999. 203 pp. £14.95 (hb). ISBN: 0-7156-2924-7

A book to accompany a successful television series often fails to capture the spirit of the original, and very rarely transcends the visual medium. I enjoyed the television series, which largely managed to get across psychodynamic concepts in an accessible way. I was left, however, with an impression that the television director had chosen charismatic figures and had brought together the 'plot' in each episode but left viewers still uncertain of what the Tavistock as an institution stands for.

This book is far more than a book to support the television series: it is a rich and resonant account of the practice and theory underlying psychoanalytic approaches to therapy. That would be enough to earn a recommendation for libraries, but the book goes well beyond an account of psychoanalytic practice. It takes a life-cycle view and cleverly weaves in issues of groups, families and institutions that have been central to the work of the Tavistock.

The style is a compelling mix of clinical and observational anecdotes, linked to clear expositions of some complex theoretical ideas. These are salted with humour and some excellent plate photographs. Black and white photographic plates might not have been allowed if this had been published directly by the BBC, but, the relatively simple technology is extremely powerful in conveying emotional meaning. For example, there are stills from the Robertsons' cine-film of Laura adjacent to an image of the Madonna and child, to show the physicality of infant desire, and a further image of two youths and a boy looking at the camera with 'frozen watchfulness'. These images add poignancy to the text that is already saturated with meaning.

Although I enjoyed the book greatly, the authors are also clear in setting out a position that can be contested. For example, the excellent chapters covering childhood make assumptions about the development of cognition and memory that do not sit easily with modern developmental psychology. On the other hand, the book tackles the very difficult theme of childhood sexuality and aggres-

sion in a way that presents Melanie Klein in an accessible way.

I had expected to review a book that gave an interesting set of programme notes to the television series. The book does indeed complement the series in this way, but goes far beyond that. The Tavistock is a diverse institution, and the editor has done something of real value in this synthesis. In the chapter 'What causes the mind?' there is a discussion of Proust who "understood that memory and imagination have to be sought actively, too, by mental effort". This book is evidence of the effort to develop a style of psychoanalytic thinking that characterises the Tavistock.

I would recommend the book to a medical student struggling to understand family reaction to the death of an infant, to a psychiatric trainee who is curious about psychoanalysis, to a friend making sense of a hostile work environment and to seasoned colleagues who knew the theory but would welcome the clinical depth. The book could be read sequentially to give a chronological and developmental overview, linked to particular episodes of the television series, used as a basis for a reading seminar or dipped into and enjoyed.

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Forget Me Not. Mental Health Services for Older People

By the Audit Commission. London: Audit Commission. 2000. 190 pp. £20.00 (pb). ISBN: 1-86240-203-5

Everyone involved with services for the elderly with mental illness should welcome this report from the Audit Commission. Effectively a bench marking exercise covering England and Wales during 2000 and 2001, this is the first time the auditors have attended to this area of clinical practice. By involving NHS trusts, health authorities, social service departments, the independent sector, carers and primary care it is the first attempt by the Commission to evaluate working across agencies with a strong emphasis on 'joined-up working'.

This first report includes 12 anonymised areas and provides comparative data about the commissioning and resourcing of services and methods of service delivery, with a good deal of opinion from carers and primary care. Bar charts make the data easy to view and each of the six sections conclude with clear and convincing recommendations. There are valuable