

### Comment

The needs of severely mentally ill offenders cannot be met in the hospital wings of prisons. Gunn *et al* (1991) surveyed 5% of prisoners in England and Wales and from their data suggested that 37% had psychiatric disorders. They also estimated that there could be as many as 700 sentenced prisoners who are psychotic.

Hospital wings of prisons are not recognised as hospitals; therefore powers under the Mental Health Act of forcibly treating psychotic prisoners under this legislation is clearly inappropriate. Many psychotic prisoners therefore find themselves confined in 'strip' cells.

Remand prisoners are under particular stress and the mentally ill are over-represented among prison suicides. Taylor & Gunn (1984) found that at least 9% of men remanded to Brixton prison were psychotic.

We were particularly concerned about the number of prisoners suffering from schizophrenia within Cardiff Prison. It has been estimated in a ten year follow-up of patients with schizophrenia in the community that 30% had some contact with the police and 12% were convicted of offences which were usually minor. Many of the offences took place because the patients were unable to care for themselves or had behaved inappropriately in a public place (Johnstone, 1991).

General psychiatrists need to be actively involved in the diversion of the mentally ill from the criminal justice system at all levels, from arrest by police to the extrication of the seriously mentally ill convicted prisoner. General psychiatrists ask where the extra resources are to come from to look after the diverted offender patients. The answer is that the majority of the schizophrenic inmates in our series were already known to general psychiatric services. Mentally disordered offenders should not be denied treatment merely by being offenders.

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### References

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- P.L. Huckle, *Senior Registrar in Forensic Psychiatry*; and Tegwyn Williams, *Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist, The South Wales Forensic Psychiatric Service, The Caswell Clinic, Glanrhyd Hospital, Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan CF31 4LN*

### Addendum

Since the submission of this article, Cardiff Prison have changed their policy regarding the use of the unfurnished cell (the 'strip' cell). It is used only to manage actively suicidal prisoners, not to contain those who are psychotic.