

The briefest definition

To reside in doctors' quarters of a large psychiatric hospital may not only be convenient but also at times illuminating, particularly so for young children who can at times be surprisingly perceptive.

At that time we were renting an impressive top-floor flat adjacent to a psychiatric unit. One evening, an old lady (with an obvious diagnosis) rent the air with earpiercing cries of: "Help! Help! Call the police!" As I continued, unperturbed, to serve dinner, my son, then aged 3½ years, looked at me anxiously and exclaimed: "Mum, are you deaf? Why aren't you calling the police?". "Oh, I

replied, "Don't worry, the old lady is ill in the head. She is one of our patients and I can assure you that she is being well looked after". He calmed down but looked unconvinced.

A week later he approached me looking somewhat relieved and said: "Mama, I now know what a patient means: It is somebody who cries 'help, help' and is in no danger!".

E. Cybulska, *Consultant Psychiatrist, Stone House, Thameslink Healthcare Services NHS Trust, Dartford, Kent*

Books from Gaskell



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