



be overcome. One early chapter reviews a survey of specialist registrars' attitudes to research opportunities during their training, and the obstacles they face. Lack of time, appropriate support and their need for supervision are already widely recognised, but here the authors reveal less well appreciated and more ominous sounding syndromes, including "the canteen culture" of the "anti-research milieu", profound attacks of procrastination and acute unpredictable episodes of deep-seated vacillation. A later chapter, entitled 'Maintaining momentum', revisits each of these potential obstacles one by one, inviting the readers to identify those barriers most relevant to their own progress, helping them to devise specific plans to overcome them. Presentation is another strong point of this publication, with emphasis placed on the use of summary boxes in the text to direct the reader's attention to the salient issues raised in each of the chapters.

In taking this practical, problem-focused approach less space is devoted to more technical questions, such as study design or sample selection. The coverage of such issues relevant to quantitative studies is therefore not exhaustive, while those for qualitative designs is almost non-existent, and is mainly limited to highlighting the various differences between these two approaches. For instance, there are three chapters dealing with aspects of the analysis of quantitative data, but virtually no mention is made of the range of methods appropriate to the analysis of qualitative material. This seems to be a lost opportunity when a pluralist approach combining both methods is now promoted by many investigators, as well as those who commission their work. If support for research generally is hard to come by, that for qualitative approaches in particular is even thinner on the ground. A similarly practical approach in this area would have been a bonus.

This is a useful book, and contains much wisdom for anyone interested in the 'how to do it' of research work. The text seems to roll along with a momentum of its own, and is pervaded with a sense of the editors' enthusiasm. It is refreshingly

down to earth and accessible, and the covers of many of its copies will quickly become dog-eared and tatty around the edges because its owners have so often had reason to dip into it and draw on the useful lessons learnt, and shared here, by others.

Sarah Marriott, Consultant Psychiatrist, Paterson Centre for Mental Health, 20 South Wharf Road, London W2 1PD

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

By Peter Dally. London: Robson. 1999. 225 pp. £16.95. ISBN 1-86105-219-7

If you are from the upper social classes and becoming manic, your illness is manifest in slightly more flamboyant ways; in 1908 Virginia Woolf and friends took part in the now famous Dreadnought Hoax. A telegram was sent to *HMS Dreadnought*, the flagship of the British home fleet then anchored at Weymouth, advising the Admiral of a visit by the Emperor of Abyssinia and four of his entourage. The group (Woolf *et al*) all disguised by dark greasepaint and wearing flowing robes, were met by a guard of honour at the station and escorted round the ship by the captain. Woolf's brother played the interpreter and used what one sailor called a 'rum lingo'. Virginia remained silent, which is perhaps why they escaped detection. They got back safely and all would have been well, had not one of the party informed the press, whereupon a storm broke over their heads.

This anecdote comes from Peter Dally's biography of Virginia Woolf, with particular reference to her manic-depressive illness and the desperate attempts by her husband, Leonard, to cope with it. A retired consultant psychiatrist from the Westminster Hospital, Dally has painstakingly researched the inner dynamics of the dazzling Bloomsbury group. The gripping story that emerges is that some of the 20th century's brightest minds seemed curiously incapable of applying their

intellects to the basic challenges of the emotional difficulties in their own lives.

Earlier in her life, Lytton Strachey, widely known to be a confirmed homosexual, proposed to Virginia and she accepted, to his shock and dismay, but they both managed to extricate themselves from the quagmire.

Leonard and Virginia's own married sex life seems to have been deeply unsatisfactory from an early stage, yet they appeared to have done little to use their vast educational resources to inform themselves about possible solutions. Despite Leonard taking over the publishing of the International Psycho-Analytical Library, he made almost no attempts to obtain any kind of ongoing therapeutic help for Virginia's manic depression. She read Freud 'compulsively' for a while, yet also seemed unable to attempt any psychological understanding of her moods. No doctor specialising in neurology or psychiatry was ever engaged for help by the Woolfs for any prolonged period.

Dally prefers dispassionate reporting of the facts rather than a polemic, but what emerges is a group of gifted individuals reduced to rather immature avoidances whenever in danger of confronting their own difficulties. There are some interesting clues here for the clinical psychiatrist of why sometimes the most intellectual patients are oddly the most difficult to treat.

Indeed, this eventually proved Virginia's undoing as Leonard took her to see a kind of family doctor inexperienced in mental illness, living miles away, for an inadequate consultation the day before her suicide. The ultimate tragedy of untreated manic depression is poignantly apparent in her suicide note – the deep loss to all of us when creativity and genius cannot be protected from the ravages of mental illness, or perhaps darkly inevitable insight. Her final lines ever include "... I am certain I am going mad again ... I am always hearing voices, and I know I shan't get over it now."

Raj Persaud, Consultant Psychiatrist, Maudsley Hospital, De Crespigny Park, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8AF

miscellany

Treatment decisions in young people – new information sheets by FOCUS

Involving children and adolescents in decisions about their medical treatment

has been an area of considerable debate and contention for some time. This issue has been front-page news, especially when controversial court decisions are made to overrule children's and/or parents' decisions about the medical treatment they wish to receive or decline. This is, however, an everyday issue for practitioners who care for children. For

this reason, FOCUS, the child and adolescent mental health project at the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Research Unit has produced a set of three information sheets that give an overview of some of the key issues in this complex area.

Sheet number 1: The Legal Framework covers issues such as consent, refusal and competence (to decide) in relation to Acts