

## NOTE

- 1 Phillips, D. R. and Vincent, J., 'Private residential accommodation for the elderly: geographical aspects of developments in Devon', *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, 11 (1987), 155-173.

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## Clinical Psychology

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C. J. Gilleard, Influence of emotional distress among supporters on the outcome of psychogeriatric day care. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 150 (1987), 219-223.

High priority to 'more day care' is given by mental health planners anticipating a Big Bang in provision of community services for old people. Until quite recently such preference rested on little more than subjective impressions that it 'feels right' for day centres, often run by volunteers with relatively little professional input, to offer a low-cost means of reducing pressure on hospital resources. Most service providers are 'bullish' for day care, claiming that most provision is: local; relatively homely; able to relieve boredom and loneliness; actually or potentially a base for assessment, and in some cases, for therapy; offers practical respite for informal carers; and gives community workers resources to offer in negotiating shared care.

Only rarely does a 'bearish' tendency appear, in the misgivings of some critics who see day care for some attenders as a limbo, foreshadowing the parting that is to come, and augmenting 'confusion' in an unfamiliar environment buzzing with arbitrary 'games', like a nightmarish prolonged children's party run by well-intentioned adults who assume they know what's good for the guests. Such pessimists suggest that for the informal carer at home absence makes the heart grow harder, more preoccupied with engineering the next step of holiday relief admission to up the dosage of new-found addictive tranquillity.

Almost certainly, the true picture has been one of many shades of grey. Certain attenders or carers appear to show some net benefit, while others seem to gain little or nothing from the experience, and winners or losers are by no means easy to predict.

Slowly and steadily, though, our understanding of the impact of psychogeriatric day care is being advanced by Chris Gilleard and his

Scots colleagues. This paper extends his analysis of data from 129 patient-supporter pairs, in which the patient was a community referral for day care. While its style is leaden and sub-sample totals irritate by failing to add up, the author effectively examines as his principal hypothesis, that the level of strain experienced by supporters contributes directly to the breakdown of community care, and that day care is effective in keeping the old person at home when it serves to reduce supporter distress.

Each of the supporters was interviewed at offer of day care, and again 3 and 6–7 months later. Measures included: a checklist for patient's behaviour problems; the 30-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) as an index of carer's emotional distress; and a strain scale to tap carer's strain of caring.

The major findings were: day care reduced emotional distress as measured by GHQ for most carers, particularly over the first 3 months; and the minority of carers whose dependent had been admitted for long-term care at the 6–7 month follow-up and, who had not experienced this early reduction, did experience a significant reduction in emotional distress after admission for long-term care had been arranged.

Interestingly, the number of behaviour problems and the strain of caring remained unchanged.

How does day care achieve the reduction in distress? What are the distinctive features of carers whose distress is not reduced by day care? Gilleard recognises that these questions remain to be answered, but argues that his findings to date of a general reduction in carer's emotional distress which is predictive of sustained care at home, 'offer considerable optimism concerning the potential of psychogeriatric day hospitals to contribute to the community care of the elderly mentally infirm' (p. 222).

This is not too large a claim, and on behalf of service planners and providers concerned to invest resources profitably, I am glad to be able to express our gratitude for the inside information held out by his research.

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