Dr John Hurst MB, DPM, FRCPsych
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Dr John Hurst’s approach to the treatment of people with intellectual disabilities was ahead of its time. In the early 1970s, John, who has died aged 79, developed the pre-discharge unit at South Ockenden Hospital, Essex, as a therapeutic community, as well as a number of community group homes. He also introduced one of the earliest community nursing services in intellectual disability there between 1972 and 1975. Between 1974 and 1977, as Chair of the Outward Housing Group in Watham Forest, he was instrumental in bringing together housing associations, Mencap and community nursing to provide supported group homes for former in-patients. Through the Clifford Trust at Leytonstone Hospital, he was involved in fostering work with children with profound disability who were placed in institutions and used music therapy to increase their awareness and communication. He moved to Lea Castle Hospital in 1978, initially as the consultant responsible for the deaf/blind unit, where he introduced the teaching of Makaton signing for people with severe intellectual disabilities and deafness.

In 1982 – following an incident in which a 20-year-old woman with mild intellectual disability had to spend 6 months in custody because the courts could find no suitable placement for her – John became the consultant to a newly created unit for people with mild intellectual disabilities and mental illness, implementing therapeutic community principles to meet patients’ emotional needs. He was a pioneer in the use of psychotherapy for people with intellectual disabilities and published on the benefits of holiday homes for people with intellectual disabilities and deafness. In the summer of 2011, John became ill with septicaemia secondary to cellulitis around a foot ulcer which he developed on a cruise to Turkey, just before the world cruise he and Ian entered into a civil partnership in 2006 at a touching ceremony at the ‘Plough and Harrow’ in Birmingham. John had a lifelong passion for classical music and opera and used to entertain his friends’ children telling them how he used to listen at the door of churches in Oxford as a child. After his retirement in 1991, he and Ian travelled extensively, putting pins on the world map in their conservatory to mark the many places they had visited.

John was a wonderful and caring clinician, teacher and friend who could find something good in everyone and never said a harsh word about others. He leaves behind his partner Ian and his extended family of ex-trainees and their children, all of whom miss him greatly.

Meera Roy, Ashok Roy