Reviews


The Mental Health Act 1983 is a complex piece of legislation with its accompanying Regulations and Rules. No one can understand the new Act without knowing what these Statutory Instruments mean, and both these books assist psychiatrists by cogently guiding us along the right paths. In comparison, the DHSS's Memorandum on the Mental Health Act 1983 is stodgy and takes a lot of effort to comprehend. Both guides are typographically attractive and the chapters have been organized with care. Larry Gostin's chapter on 'Patients Concerned in Criminal Proceedings' is particularly clear and usefully refers to legislation affecting such patients other than the Mental Health Act 1983. On the other hand, his chapter on Mental Health Review Tribunals is rather thin and psychiatrists will certainly prefer Professor Bluglass's work, which spells out the criteria Tribunals have to consider for unrestricted and restricted patients: it is important to remember that there are now opportunities for patients on 28-day orders to appeal to Tribunals and 'automatic' Tribunals for all those on longer term orders.

Professor Bluglass is more informative, too, on Consent to Treatment, and this chapter has simple, but accurate, flowcharts. Comparison of their respective chapters on this important topic graphically illustrate the difference in philosophy between the two works: where the conditions for administering treatment have not been fulfilled, Mr Gostin says 'Don't treat', whereas Professor Bluglass rightly says 'Consider an alternative treatment'.

While Larry Gostin has largely discarded his 'pressure group' role, there are several instances where he strays from fact into opinion and propaganda. One concerns psychopathic disorder, where he wrongly says that the Butler Committee on Mentally Abnormal Offenders concluded that psychiatry was unable to provide any effective treatment for psychopathic disorders. The Butler Committee certainly weighed the evidence before them, but their conclusions were somewhat different: '... there is continuing uncertainty as to the treatability, in a medical sense, of the various conditions covered by the term psychopathic disorder or of the methods to be used.' The legal term 'psychopathic disorder' covers a range of patients with varying psychopathology, often with a neurotic basis. Mr Gostin's recommendation that 'behavioural goals' should be given to justify treatment pro-

...