

Furthermore, in our field, we have had difficulty finding suitable instruments. Most are American and do not 'translate' well. They put much emphasis on the financial burden of caring, which has not been an issue in this country (although we recognise that it is becoming a more important factor with changes in health and community care).

One has to decide who is going to undertake the evaluation. It is impossible for a counsellor to evaluate objectively his or her own work. Clients must feel able to respond honestly and without prejudice. In our case, we reassured carers that their relative would suffer no lack of care if they (the carer) decided not to participate in the evaluation, or if their comments were uncomplimentary.

We decided, after much thought and consultation with colleagues in the University of Bristol Social Work Department, to use a balance of quantitative and qualitative data. We used the HAD (Zigmond & Snaith, 1983) together with the CADI and CASI (Nolan *et al.*, 1989, 1990) to give us hard data which would provide only a background, and supplemented this with the results of a semi-structured interview administered by an unbiased researcher from the Social Work Department.

We have found that a counselling service for carers of people with dementia is extremely beneficial in helping them to cope with their caring.

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Victims of childhood sexual abuse

Sir: I read with interest the article by Macpherson & Babiker, (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, February 1994, **18**, 70-72) on 'Who works with adult victims of childhood sexual abuse?'. The need for agreed strategies involving training, supervision and inter-agency co-operation to deal with this increasingly common problem should not, however, be confined to adult mental health services alone.

As a child psychiatrist, my major focus in abuse work is directed towards victims who have

yet to reach adulthood. My own experience, however, as well as that of other authors (Goodwin *et al.*, 1981), is that among incestuous families, mothers have often been victims of child sexual abuse themselves, which has often not been previously disclosed. The importance of the support of the mother in determining the prognosis of the child is recognised within our own service by the provision of professional therapeutic support for non-abusing parents as well as appropriate therapy for the child. While this input for parents is designed primarily to enable them to support their children, our experience would suggest that they often use this contact with professionals to explore issues from their own past, including disclosure of their own experiences of abuse. Many of these women appear to be in need of long-term psychotherapeutic support which lies outside the remit of a child psychiatric service. I would suggest therefore that there is a need for agreed strategies involving close co-operation between child and adult mental health services to deal with the parents of abused children who have themselves been victims of childhood sexual abuse.

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Suicide prevention

I read with interest the letter concerning suicide and its prevention by Ashbridge & Milne (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, February 1994, **18**, 110) and would like to add further, and I think more radically, to the author's comments in questioning the feasibility of achieving the *Health of the Nation* goals.

The reasons and circumstances which lead people to attempt or commit suicide are complex and varied and underlying treatable psychiatric illness is only one factor to be considered.

In the rhetoric of prevention of suicide, the political and personal reasons behind what is essentially a desperate and angry act fail to be addressed. Unemployment and its effects on self-esteem, quality of life, level of distress and suicidal behaviour is an example of a significant factor which is being almost totally overlooked by government in the discourse of suicide prevention and in setting targets for improvement of the nation's health. (For a recent study linking unemployment to suicide risk see Pritchard, 1992).

Aimed to assuage the guilt of the politicians, soothe administrators and encourage the search