

## Review

### **The Islington Mental Health Forum.**

By Brian Harris. London: Pp 31. GPMH (Good Practices in Mental Health). 1989.

It is rare nowadays to come across a service plan or official document which does not make reference to the desirability of involving service users in the planning, or even management, of mental health services. The advantages are obvious. Patients have a unique perception of their own needs and vivid appreciation of the relevance and quality of the services they have received. It would be foolish not to take their views into account as the psychiatric system develops patterns of service which will last well into the next century.

Despite these statements of intent, precious little is actually happening. Brian Harris' booklet claims to be "a case study in how to get users involved". Unfortunately, Mr Harris adopts the author as hero approach in a personal account of a project for which he was co-ordinator. The objectivity and/or variety of perspectives which would grace a genuine case study are sadly absent. Furthermore, it is not clear for which audience Mr Harris thinks he is writing. On occasions he adopts a comic-book language, for instance when he describes his personal style as being a "cut the crap" – let's go approach'. At other times he adopts a pseudo-analytical tone; "This (view) is mainly heard from those who adhere to a post 1960's neo-Rogerian viewpoint". Sometimes he is simply incomprehensible, as when he mysteriously proclaims that during initial meetings with staff he "refused to play the recrimination game". Mr Harris is clearly in need of a stern editor.

Such external advice might also have helped the layout. Sections often have misleading headings and then plough on for pages with no further indication to the reader of what are the key issues. This is a shame as there is some advice which would be of help to service users buried in this pamphlet. The Islington Forum is, however, a stark example of the main problem facing advocacy in mental health services. The lack of secure independent funding for co-ordination roles such as that undertaken by Mr Harris is holding up this important work. In Holland there is a Government Funded Advocacy Agency which pays for an independent advocate in every Dutch psychiatric hospital. In these days of consumer rights and service audit such a funding approach is overdue in this country. We should not underestimate the support the Royal College and individual psychiatrists could offer a campaign for secure funding. In the meantime, articles by Peter Campbell (1988, 1989) offer a much better introduction to the issues of advocacy in Mental Health Services than Mr Harris' booklet.

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### *References*

- CAMPBELL, P. (1988) Giants and Goblins. In *Power in Strange Places* (eds I. Barker & E. Peck) London: GPMH.  
— (1989) The Self-Advocacy Movement in the UK. In *Mental Health Care in Crisis*. (ed. Grimshaw). London: Pluto.

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*"The most effective medical treatment for insanity so far discovered is occupational therapy, which means regular work of some sort."*

R. PARTRIDGE