

## Psychiatry in pictures

CHOSEN BY ROBERT HOWARD

Do you have an image, preferably accompanied by 100 to 200 words of explanatory text, that you think would be suitable for Psychiatry in Pictures? Submissions are very welcome and should be sent direct to Professor Robert Howard, Box 070, Institute of Psychiatry, London SE5 8AF, UK.



Dr Bob Adams (b. 1957)

After leaving school I got a job as a nursing assistant in a large mental hospital near where I lived. The year was 1975 and I was 17 years old. The hospital was a traditional Victorian asylum with many long-stay wards. I was naïve and knew nothing about mental illness. I shared the public's view that people with mental illness were somewhat different from us and I had to be careful for my safety. I arrived on the first day full of trepidation, was given a white coat and taken to a male ward. I planned to stay for a few months pending interviews for medical school. I ended up staying for a year. It was busy at the beginning and end of the day, mealtimes and medication times. The rest of the time there was little to do and I sat with those patients who did not go to industrial therapy and if the weather was fine took them for a walk around the gardens in a long column. Nursing assistants were not allowed to work on the 'admission wards', which seemed like another world the other side of the gardens. I whiled away the time by drawing the patients. Some of them never spoke. When I asked them to sign their names on their portraits I was amazed that they could write perfect signatures (deleted for reasons of confidentiality). Looking at the pictures now I can remember the patients as if it was yesterday – all their nuances, foibles and mannerisms. If I had not had that experience, it is doubtful that I would have spent the past 20 years working as a psychiatrist. (Text and pictures courtesy of Dr Bob Adams, Consultant Psychiatrist, Selby and York Mental Health Services, York YO30 7BY.)

