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## POEM

# 'Patients' by U. A. Fanthorpe

Selected by Femi Oyebo

U.A. Fanthorpe was born in 1929. She read English at St Anne's College, Oxford and later taught English at Cheltenham Ladies' College. She is of interest to psychiatrists because she worked as a receptionist at the Burden Hospital in Bristol from 1974 to 1989. This poem is drawn from her experience at the Burden Hospital. She was appointed CBE in 2001 and awarded the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 2003. 'Patients' is reproduced from *Collected Poems 1978–2003*, by U.A. Fanthorpe (Peterloo Poets, 2005). ©U.A. Fanthorpe.

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Not the official ones, who have been  
Diagnosed and made tidy. They are  
The better sort of patient.

They know the answers to the difficult  
Questions on the admission sheet  
About religion, next of kin, sex.

They know the rules. The printed ones  
In the *Guide for Patients*, about why we prefer  
No smoking, the correct postal address;

Also the real ones, like the precise quota  
Of servility each doctor expects,  
When to have fits, and where to die.

These are not true patients. They know  
Their way around, they present the right  
Symptoms. But what can be done for us,

The undiagnosed? What drugs  
Will help our Matron, whose cats are  
Her old black husband and her young black son?

Who will prescribe for our nurses, fatally  
Addicted to idleness and tea? What therapy  
Will relieve our Psychiatrist of his lust

For young slim girls, who prudently  
Pretend to his excitement, though age  
Has freckled his hands and his breath smells old?

There is no cure for us. O, if only  
We could cherish our bizarre behaviour  
With accurate clinical pity. But there are no

Notes to chart our journey, no one  
Has even stamped CONFIDENTIAL or *Not to be  
Taken out of the hospital* on our lives.