

argued that this use of "excellence" was to be found at the opposite end of a dimension from relevance. What the rural team needed (and they had been saying so out loud since 1980) was some more team members. A few players from a team of international excellence (say Liverpool) could, if they played for a less excellent team (say Hartlepool), be a great help to the team and their supporters.

It is regrettable that this political psychiatric grandstanding team has continued into 1989.

J. S. B. LINDSAY

1/60 Broadway  
Nedlands, Western Australia

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### Coroner – A change in practice?

DEAR SIRS

I gave evidence at the inquest of GD yesterday. I expected my role to be fairly straightforward as it seemed to me a clearer case of suicide than usual. Admittedly, I had not seen him for two years but then he, after admission, had been so self destructive in the ward (an unusual happening these days), that he had a special nurse assigned for three days. An unknown patient, after being quiet and withdrawn for a month, he became acutely ill on the day of emergency admission when he thought he had to die. He had heard the Death March being played for him. He had a compulsion to kill himself and this persisted in the ward. He left the ward much improved but a little earlier than we would have wished and declined day hospital or out-patient care because he was moving to Manchester.

Two years later, after he had been abroad a lot, his doctor was suddenly called because he was beginning to get ill again. The doctor's assessment was that an urgent DV the following day would suffice. In the middle of the night he mutilated himself so extensively and badly with a razor blade that he was exsanguinated. At the last moment he did knock on his mother's door and asked her to call an ambulance.

The Coroner accepted that it was his intention to die (not just to do grievous bodily harm). He asked

me, "Had he used the razor blade on somebody else and killed them, would it be your opinion that was of unsound mind?" I answered that "if he had been charged with murder it would be my opinion that he would be saved by the McNaughton Rules".

The Coroner then proceeded in his summing up to say that he was satisfied that the man intended to take his life but he was bound by a judgment of Lord Justice Devlin in implying that a man of unsound mind could neither formulate the intent to murder nor to take his own life, and he returned a verdict of undetermined death.

I had words with the Coroner, whom I know well, afterwards, and suggested that if the case went to appeal his verdict would be overturned. He went on to inform me that he and many Coroners were now recording a large number of undetermined verdicts (he suggested that they now exceeded, in his domain, the verdict of suicide) and he agreed that this was all very unfortunate as it would so distort suicide statistics. This is of importance if it is happening nationally; until now, in this country, suicide statistics had been one of the few hard data facts in psychiatry.

I. G. THOMSON

Whitecroft Hospital  
Newport, Isle of Wight  
PO30 3EB

### Changes in the use of the Mental Health Act 1983 four years from its inception in Leeds Eastern Health Authority

DEAR SIRS

As a junior I was recommended the following guidelines, hopefully indicative of good practice within the spirit rather than the letter of the new Act.

1. *Emergency powers* should be used only for instances of dire necessity since there is no right of appeal and no treatment without consent. Such powers terminated by the second doctor should be a small proportion of the total, and should never be left to expire at 72 hours without the patient having had the benefit of a second medical opinion.

2. *Duration of detention* – the RMO should rescind the Section at the earliest opportunity rather than allowing it to expire. Having become informal, it would seem prudent to encourage the patient to remain in hospital before discharge to assess compliance and foster relationships not based on compulsion.

5. *Section 3* – powers lasting less than 28 days should be few.

To assess use of the Act in these areas at its inception and four years later, one hundred periods of detention from November 1983 were compared with another hundred from July 1987.