

Alison Norman, *Mental Illness in Old Age: Meeting the Challenge*, Centre for Policy on Ageing, London, 1982, 135 pp., £5.75 paperback, ISBN 0 904 139 29 8.

As the foreword states, 'CPA has chosen mental illness in old age as the subject of the first in the Policy Studies in Ageing series because it is an issue which is basic to all other aspects of successful ageing and good service provision'. Everyone interested or working with the elderly would concur that it is indeed pertinent that such priority should be given to this topic.

However, perhaps a reverse ordering of the title would have been more appropriate for this slim volume since the present title might lead the unwary reader to expect a medically oriented work completely devoted to definition, diagnosis, epidemiology, aetiology and treatment of disease processes.

Leaving this minor criticism aside it must be stated that Ms Norman has made a good job of what she set out to do, i.e. to review the services available for those elderly patients who have mental illness and their families who support them.

The first chapters contain easily comprehensible and brief descriptions of the types of mental illness which commonly prevail in older age groups. Organic Brain Syndrome, with its insidious and in most cases slow but unrelenting progress, is well considered.

Further chapters describe the expected roles of the various health professionals in primary care and treatment, and good outlines are given of day hospital facilities, assessment units and long-term psychiatric and residential care.

Short accounts of recently developed schemes in intensive home care are given as well as some mention of the general problems of innovative projects due to consumer resistance or those which arise from the fact that their implementation crosses a number of boundaries in terms of employment, law, financial and legal responsibility, never mind the difficulty in finding funding for them.

The author modestly states that the review is, 'cursory and inadequate', yet nowhere else could one find a *Which?* guide to contemporary services for the mentally ill elderly person in the U.K. that also includes the stated aims and philosophies of the operators of such services.

Today, this is a major little book in the UK and should be on everyone's bookshelf. One hopes it will be updated as progress in this field is made.

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