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# Book review

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**Maudsley Discussion Paper No. 5: Has Community Care Failed?** GRAHAM THORNICROFT and DAVID GOLDBERG. London: Department of Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry. 1998. 27 pp. £2.95 (pb).

This excellent and readable pamphlet is based on Graham Thornicroft's inaugural lecture at the Institute of Psychiatry. It provides an abbreviated history of community mental health care policy in the UK since 1954, the peak year of bed occupancy, evaluates some of the familiar arguments against community care (there are not enough beds, homeless mentally ill people are walking the streets, dangerous people are being let loose to kill, staff are under intolerable stress) and puts forward a range of positives about the policy and its implementation. Inevitably in such an abbreviated document there are compressions and infelicities. The history offered is not entirely accurate: in policy terms community care has been officially promoted since the Mental Treatment Act 1930. Over the succeeding 70 years terminology, philosophy and professional practice have unsurprisingly shifted dramatically. The issue of family burden is glossed over. Studies of burden reported in the 1960s showed that the policy did increase burden and distress in relatives. The more recent positive findings quoted in this paper in fact

compare good community care with bad, the former being unsurprisingly superior. Recent data on the prevalence of psychosis among convicted prisoners in the UK, if accurate, is far from reassuring about the success of the policy of diversion from the criminal justice system. Thornicroft & Goldberg helpfully draw a distinction between efficacy, how something works under experimental conditions, and effectiveness, how something works in real life. They present data from the PRISM study, recently published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, that, perhaps, provides reassurance on the effectiveness question.

So, has community care failed? Thornicroft and Goldberg fudge the issue: for them it has only been half implemented, so there has not been a fair test. Personally, I think the question is so broad as to be meaningless, or at least only on the 'sound-bite' level of discourse of politicians. But who am I to quibble: Frank Dobson, the Secretary of State, has spoken (or rather released a press statement) and so we now know that community care has indeed failed.

FRANK HOLLOWAY, *Consultant Psychiatrist, Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8AZ*