

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

See: *Assessing Client Participation in Mental Handicap Services*, by T. M. Crocker,
B.J.M.S., 1990, 98-107.

Letter to the Editor (P. Chamberlain)
B.J.M.S., 1992, 74, *The Editor*

The Editor
British Journal of Mental Subnormality
"The Globe"
4 Great William Street
Stratford-upon-Avon
CV37 6RY
United Kingdom

Ashfield Community Health Centre
96 Charlotte Street
Ashfield
NSW F 2131
Australia

October 8th, 1991

Dear Sir,

Thank you for forwarding me a copy of Paul Chamberlain's letter of 3/5/91.

I am indebted to Dr. Chamberlain for pointing out the inaccuracies in my description of materials he has written.

I am heartened by the fact that he seems to agree with me on at least two points: Firstly, that the completion of documents and scheduling of meetings will not, of themselves, influence client involvement (It seemed to me that my data demonstrated this) and secondly, that client involvement is a function of the system of service delivery (or as I have put it that clients should be exposed to "actual opportunities to exert influence on the behaviour of the service").

I am somewhat concerned at the content of the penultimate paragraph of the letter. Is Dr. Chamberlain suggesting that all ATC's are "institutional settings" in which one is "unlikely to find any real client involvement?" Should SSD's demolish their ATC's before investing in life plan materials? I note also that the settings I observed are contrasted with "environments in which (service users) are valued, have control, choices etc." In my experience, all the staff I encountered valued their clients. Their efforts to provide control and choices however, sometimes had to be balanced against many other pressures placed upon them.

By way of explanation for my errors I can only say that my approach was to begin by attempting to get a "snapshot" of services in action at the grass roots level rather than by consulting the writings of Dr. Chamberlain or any other

authority on the subject. I learned of the Life Plan materials through these observations and examined them in retrospect for the sake of completeness. I can only apologise for the carelessness with which I did this. At the time of the observations the "PLAN workpacks" had not been published and the STEP staff training package seemed to be the only training provided in association with life planning. I welcome the advent of PLAN workpacks and hope they will resolve some of the dilemmas faced by direct care staff especially those under pressure to get their clients "life planned".

I therefore cannot agree that my article is "essentially a critique" of Dr. Chamberlain's work or anything else. It is essentially an attempt to find out if client involvement can be assessed in a way that provides a basis for future action. I would suggest that his description of me as "naive" is a matter of personal opinion and not relevant to any constructive discussion.

In conclusion, I maintain that I am not merely "focussing on the importance of client participation" but also suggesting that client participation can be assessed through examining the client's systems of dealing with the service as well as the service's system of dealing with the clients.

Yours faithfully,

Tom Crocker