

# The British Journal of DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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## EDITORIAL

Readers may have noticed that with this issue the 40th volume of the Journal has been completed. For the British Society which is responsible for the creation of the Journal this is a rather special day and also for this Editor who has laboured since its inception to keep the fledgling alive and healthy and has seen it grow up into a mature age.

This is therefore an occasion for a short review of forty years of specialized work which accompanies and reflects some aspects of care, training and education in mental handicap.

Those early sixties were heady days because a new generation of young professionals, returned from the war, made their first impact on the custodial, feudal "Colonies" which had, being "out of sight, out of mind", perpetuated practices the early pioneers would have considered inhuman and utterly objectionable. Those young psychiatrists, having taken over from retiring or retired medical superintendents, introduced new ideas and new approaches in their institutions, fighting a laborious battle against prejudice, vested interests, traditions and indolence by the staff and committees. It was also the time when newly introduced disciplines, such as psychologists, were met with resistance and rejection by many of the establishment, though not by the younger members. This writer remembers well an incident when "his" Deputy Medical Superintendent, showing round a doctor applying for a job, lamented as a drawback of the position that doctors would have to eat together with the psychologist. But, on the whole, the "generation gap" worked in favour of the new arrivals, who looked at the situation from a refreshingly new point of view. It was the time of "the Clarkes", Tizard and O'Connor, the introduction of the first "real" workshops in place of basket- and rug-making, and also the daring publication of the first scientific textbook on Mental Deficiency, written entirely by a team of non-medical contributors (Mental Deficiency, the Changing Outlook). No wonder that a Medical Superintendent enquired cautiously from this writers' "boss": "is it safe to employ a psychologist?" But putting that question was itself a sign that the tide was turning.

The first modest issue of this journal, containing the Proceedings of the "Midland Mental Deficiency Society", reflected already its multidisciplinary character by contributions from a teacher, a psychologist, a biochemist, a psychotherapist and a geneticist and was therefore directive of future developments. This was the first opportunity the various professions had of getting together in a social setting - because the hospitals supplied generous "high teas" - and getting out of their local isolation. It is true that lengthy discussions were at that time a rarity and the question and answer sessions after each lecture were mostly a painful and tiresome gallant effort by the chairman to squeeze out some hesitant question or observation. This was scarcely surprising considering that at that time, the fifties and sixties, most people still accepted the institutional arrangements in toto and thought only of improving, not of eliminating them. Even though the generous "high teas" which were supplied by the hospital management after the lecture were probably mostly opportunities for gossip rather than serious discussion, they served well in establishing interdisciplinary contacts between people who wanted to remove sterile traditions which hindered the introduction of measures thought to benefit "patients".

The "Proceeding" renamed "The Journal" of the Society and as such the first multidisciplinary professional journal in the UK was soon in demand outside the "Midlands" where the meetings took place. The further expansion into a journal with worldwide circulation was a completely natural development brought about by increased interest in the subject itself and by adhering to the policy of providing a platform for progressive research work and thought on a by now international scale. Nowadays, with a vastly changed social scene, the institutions which provided in the initial phase a home for collecting (and publishing) the contributions for the Proceedings, play only a minor part in the many provisions which are available. Providing regular free hospitality for fifty or more guests is no longer on, though it was certainly at its initial stage "value for money". The Journal has survived into an age which is very conscious of financial considerations, simply on the subscriptions without ever having had to ask for a grant or assistance from anywhere. The Society, no longer enjoying free hospitality, has put its emphasis on publications and is now adding monographs to the journal production.

H. C. Gunzburg

*This is the last time my husband will write an editorial for The British Journal of Developmental Disabilities which meant so much to him. Preparing this issue, he died after a very short illness. His life, as his work, was unpretentious, deeply honest and was marked by a great concern for those who could not fend for themselves. Our son Walter and I will never be able to stop missing him.*

Anna Gunzburg