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Special medical and nursing care needs of people with severe learning difficulties

SIR: Spencer (*Journal*, January 1992, 160, 132–133) is right to draw attention to the need for dedicated intermediate physical care facilities where people with learning disabilities can be investigated and treated to a high standard. The sick ward of this 700 bedded mental handicap hospital had 88 admissions during 1990, most of them from the four categories defined in his letter.

There is an important fifth group which was not mentioned. It is formed by people with a learning disability who live in the community and have a physical illness for which their local district general

hospital (DGH) has been unable to provide optimum care, either through limited experience with them or paucity of facilities and time for prolonged observation and treatment. A national survey of adult training centres in England and Wales showed that only 17% of trainees attending adult training centres were considered to be capable of using medical services (Whelan & Speake, 1977).

That people with learning disabilities require special facilities for their lives to be fully and safely 'normalised' may seem self-evident. It is important that purchasers of their care are made aware of these requirements.

WHELAN, E. & SPEAKE, B. (1977) *Adult Training in England and Wales: Report of the First National Survey*. Manchester: National Association of Teachers of the Mentally Handicapped and Hester Adrian Research Centre.

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A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Hypertrichiasis and mental derangement

Dr Andrea Cristani has written a paper on this subject in the *Archivio di Psichiatria*, and an abstract of it appears in the *Neurologisches Centralblatt*. He has investigated 272 cases of insanity in females and a similar number of sane women with reference to the development of hair on various parts of the body, in which it is not found under ordinary circumstances. The insane ranged in age from twenty to eighty years, while the sane were all over sixty-five. He found that hypertrichiasis in the face as well as elsewhere is

present much oftener amongst the insane than among the sane, that it is associated with signs of degeneration, and that it is more frequently present amongst insane patients in whom other signs of degeneration are present than amongst those who do not show symptoms. He also finds that the hairs are thicker and stiffer, and closely resemble those of the inferior races. The facts elicited are curious and interesting, and they are not easily explainable.

Reference

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