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Editorial



The winter issue focuses upon children with disability or illness and upon their families.

In reading the articles in this issue, it is useful to look for the thread of demonstrated commitment of our community to all its members whether they be able, disabled or ill. Unfortunately, that component is often missing. Too often it is the individual or their family who has to cope with difficulties caused by the disability, with very little assistance from the community. Assistance, if given, may not be given until after the individual or the family begins not coping. Even then, the support depends on the community's attitude to the disability or illness. Because, whether we admit it or not, our attitude is reflected in the Government and voluntary support to the existing programmes for the disabled and their families. A question which should be asked is, "Do the programmes which are available to the disabled and ill and their families truly reflect our attitudes?"

All the articles indicate the need for community support for families having physical difficulties. The article by Alan Williams focuses on the immense sadness and difficulty of coping with the death of a child when the cause of death is still a mystery. He explores the syndrome of cot death, the effect upon the child's family and the support needed by the families. He notes how little Government assistance is available for research and parental support.

Toni Meek has investigated parents' reactions to the birth of a child who is mentally handicapped. She explores how the parents handle the knowledge, and how this is given to them by professional staff. An interesting extension of this study would be to explore how the attitude of parents is influenced by professional staff and community attitudes.

Speaking from almost the opposite perspective, Rosemary Crossley gives her account of her perception of the care given by the community to children and adults who are classified as mentally handicapped and cared for in institutions. The article is published here because it can make us look again at our institutions and see if changes are required. Whether or not one accepts Ms. Crossley's perception, there is no doubt there are difficulties and suffering for all involved (individuals, parents, families, staff at institutions) in the care of disabled children. Do we care?

The two other articles in this issue explore the syndrome of addiction and its relationship to society. Both articles give evidence that demonstrated commitment by the community is required to provide adequate support and assistance to families.

Margarita Frederico