

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor,
"Mental Health".

Dear Sir,

I am writing to protest against all this current broadcasting over TV and radio, of mental hospital, or indeed any hospital patients, which—as far as I am concerned—would put me off going into any form of hospital with confidence.

I presume the patient's permission is obtained first?

Hospitals which are efficient would not have to advertise themselves and in any case it constitutes a breach of medical ethics.

As far as the patients themselves are concerned, for which the hospital primarily exists, if they have any imagination or intelligence left, it cannot help to heal while it may in fact actually retard their recovery with any confidence, especially if they knew they had been publicized. I don't imagine many doctors would like to have their case-histories broadcast either.

As for the relatives and the public, the less the patient is played into their hands, the better, if they are to recover at all; they are not all founts of goodwill and understanding, especially in the case of the mentally ill which brings out all the latent venom in the relatives besides leaving the patients open to mind-preying for the rest of their lives; and as far as the herd is concerned it is notoriously *not* a source of healing and may expose such patients to mockery, or—at best—modified behaviour. Souls should not be bared in public.

While it must amuse some people "to dance with the dafties" (I quote) no hospitals should be allowed open to the general public.

I speak from both sides as I am a State Registered Nurse, and take a dim view of all this publicity which is damaging. Mental treatment—as it stands—seems to be much too mechanical and there is far too much complacency about it.

Confidential doctor-patient-nurse consultation would be the basis of healing, *not* doctor-relatives-public discussion! (And if you must consult the relatives and pass on the patient's confidence, be sure you pick on the right relatives.)

No healthy minded person wants to wallow in other folks' illnesses or be forced to dwell on their own. But there are always plenty of the vulgarly curious and the possessive.

Yours faithfully,

M. BAILIE.

1 Laverockbank Road, Edinburgh, 5.

The above letter raises various points which may have worried readers or their patients and which need answering.

The patient's permission is always obtained and no one thought likely by their doctor to be harmed by being televised would be allowed to take part.

As to the attitude of the general public and relations, we agree that this is frequently unhelpful though only rarely as venomous as Miss Bailie states. But what is the remedy? Her idea is apparently to keep the hospitals as far away as possible from the public gaze. This has been done for years and is one cause of the present situation. The whole purpose of throwing hospitals open to the public and of publicity, including TV, is to try and change the situation which she rightly deplores. Evidence so far gained is that it is succeeding in some measure, that there is more understanding and sympathy and less horror and fear, because ignorance is being removed. No doubt it will take time. But it seems the only hope in the long run, with safeguards for individuals who would be harmed by it.—Ed.