

PRESERVATION OF CLIENT RIGHTS. Edited by G.T. Hannah. New York: The Free Press, 1981, xxii + 426 Pp.

Reviewed by Robert C. Marvit, MD
Honolulu, Hawaii

This book contains a fair amount of material that is useful for mental health professionals. The wide variety of contributors, from different backgrounds, makes this usefulness vary considerably. The whole issue of patients' rights, in this context "client rights," is of increasing concern to all of us. Our concern is shaped pragmatically by "mental health paternalism." Self-determination, autonomy, and paternalism don't get along too well together. The legal and ethical dimensions of clinical practice and clinical judgment are unclear; the resolution of these issues is far from accomplished. Theoretically, personal autonomy and self-determination are principles inherent in all doctor/patient relations. Many sections of this book address those issues and provide some practical solutions.

This reviewer is quite encouraged by the spectrum of issues in many of the chapters. The book contains enough resource information applicable to many situations encountered by community mental health centers, residential treatment facilities, and specialized mental health intervention programs.

Case law and patients' rights are undergoing a variety of evolutionary processes. No text, edited or otherwise, can possibly keep up with the changes. Nevertheless, the principles described and approaches recommended provide a reasonable template for professionals in mental health areas at least to understand (if not implement) some of the ethical and clinical principles involved in the preservation of patients' rights. Notably absent are issues concerning the right to refuse treatment and approaches dealing with specific elements of competency. These issues are addressed in various chapters but not in a cohesive manner.

This generic reference text does an admirable job of covering the spectrum of client rights in various contexts. It is a book that would be well worth having in the libraries of mental health treatment facilities. □

PATIENTS' RIGHTS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE. By James T. Ziegenfuss, PhD, MPH. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983, xiii + 233 Pp., \$19.95.

Reviewed by Nathan T. Sidley, MD

Patients' rights is a topic that is far easier for health professionals to conceive of in principle than to cope with in practice. Indeed, it is hard for us even to consider the principle, because we tend to perceive the whole area from the standpoint of the provider. This is ironic because we have to be concerned that we might be attacked by the very persons we have devoted ourselves to helping.

Books Reviewed

In a practical situation, it is virtually impossible for a physician to think *objectively* about whether a patient's claims are valid or not. Seeing the situation from the point of our adversary is, unfortunately, out of the question. At a distance, though, we can recognize that some patient-professional conflicts are preventable. In fact, some of the conflicts that occur might do so because of professionals' efforts to protect themselves. Ziegenfuss's book helps the practicing professional by discussing areas in which patient-professional or patient-institutional conflicts may arise. If one knows in advance those areas of possible conflict, subsequent problems may be avoided. The author gives suggestions as to how to deal with many of the rights issues that may arise in the course of one's professional work.

The list of topics covered is a depressing commentary on the limitations of society's resources and our human priorities. Many are issues in which a minimum standard of common decency or professional manner is required. One wonders how professional and other responsible individuals could have allowed such deterioration of their integrities. Patients have begun to fight back in court. One result is codes of rights, some of which are enforced on occasion. That they can be enforced in court for money damages against the practitioner is a serious matter. Little wonder that practitioners have become wary.

Dr. Ziegenfuss's work is an effort to help professionals to deliver, and patients to receive, better care. The basic idea is that knowledge of patients' rights, and of how one can function effectively within a setting that honors those rights, improves both effectiveness and confidence. *Patients' Rights* appears to have been designed as a textbook for a course aimed at persons who work in hospitals. It covers admission; protection from harm; proper treatment; freedom to communicate, to be visited, or to move about; confidentiality; and general competency. Each chapter discusses various issues and then summarizes the points made. While not all concerns are covered, the reader who has assimilated all the material will, with the addition of reasonable application of the old adage, *primum non nocere*, be able to handle the ordinary civil rights issues that arise with patients.

This book is a suitable resource for courses for individuals with varied educational backgrounds. It is complete enough to be appropriate for psychiatrists. It is lucid and straightforward enough so that its points can be assimilated by ward employees with little formal education.

I encourage the widespread use of this book, or of others like it, to help hospital staff provide more effective and humane care to patients by understanding better what patient rights are, and their responsibilities with respect to them. □