Correpondence

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

When I was a medical student in the early 1980s, I witnessed psychotic patients placed in strait jackets and placed in padded cells. I am haunted by their personal torment of having to go through such humiliating treatment at a time when their mental state was disintegrating. When I started training in psychiatry, strait jackets were no longer being used and the mental health services coped very well without them. As time went by, I witnessed the disappearance of the padded cell. The mental health services and the patients continued to cope and mutual respect became more evident. Unfortunately, seclusion was still being used. I worked in a medium secure unit in England that had no seclusion. They had some very violent patients that had a history of killing. The unit worked well and respect for the dignity of the patient was paramount. I came back to Ireland in 1997. Since then, I have not worked in an environment that utilised seclusion. These services to my mind worked well and the world did not fall apart. Now I am pleading with my colleagues within the mental health community to remove seclusion once and for all. It does little good and leads to a dehumanisation of the patient. Lack of manpower should not be replaced by the use of what is a degrading and inhuman intervention. Like all aspects of power that a human has over another human, if it can be abused it will be abused at times. Please bring seclusion to an end. Like the strait jacket I suspect, it will not be missed.

Yours Sincerely,

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