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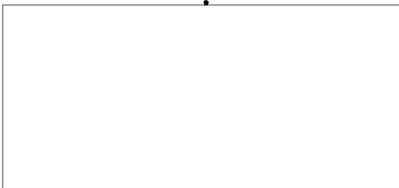
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*advice
information
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- towards better journalism -

27 January 2003



THE PRESS COMPLAINTS
COMMISSION
- 2 FEB 2004
RECEIVED

Tim Toulmin
Acting Director of PCC
Press Complaints Commission
1 Salisbury Square
London
EC4Y 8JB

Dear *Mr. Toulmin,*

Many thanks for your letter of 5 January 2004 on behalf of your chairman in response to my letter of 23 December 2003, about press coverage of mental health issues.

While we understand fully all that you say about the problems which patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 suffer – and in particular we welcome your initiative towards codifying the practice in respect of patients of the Special Hospital at Broadmoor – we do not appreciate why “it would not be possible for us {the PCC} to initiate a full investigation into the ways in which the press reports mental health issues”.

We would have thought that it would be a corollary to your earlier release of a detailed guidance note on mental health. When I was at the Mental Health Act Commission in the 1990s I was conscious of a continuing problem about coverage of detained patients, both during detention and after discharge. I am aware also that my successor at the Commission, Viscountess Runciman, raised the matter when she was a member of the Press Complaints Commission. The more that your Commission finds is inappropriate (for sound reasons) to adjudicate upon individual complaints of detained patients (and others who are being treated in the community for their mental disorders) the more necessary it is to conduct a general inquiry.

It seems to us that if the Commission is unwilling to conduct public inquiries into press behaviour, it will be doing less for the reading public than can be reasonably expected of a self-regulatory body.

I personally will be grateful if your Chairman would re-consider PressWise’s plea for an investigation into coverage of mental health issues, as depicted in the case of [redacted]. The very least we might expect is that this matter be drawn to the attention of the Editor’s Code Committee, and others now engaged upon a review of PCC procedures and the industry Code.

I look forward to your earliest response.

Yours sincerely



[redacted] Broadmoor Hospital

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