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Press Complaints Commission

From the Acting Director

5th January 2004

Sir Louis Blom Cooper
The PressWise Trust
38 Easton Business Centre
Felix Road
Bristol
BS5 0HE

Chairman
Sir Christopher Meyer

Members of the Commission
Matti Alderson
Roger Alton
Professor The Lord Chan
Edmund Curran
Paul Dacre
Jane Ennis
Mary Francis
Dr. Arthur Hearnden
Vivien Hepworth
Peter Hill
Paul Horrocks
Professor Robert Pinker
David Pollington
Dianne Thompson
The Right Rev. John Wainwright

Director
Guy Black

Sir Louis,

Thank you for your letter of 23rd December to Sir Christopher, which he has passed to me for a response.

I am most grateful for your comments on the subject of the reporting of mental health, which is certainly a very important, and difficult, issue. Indeed, as you quite rightly point out, this is something on which the PCC has previously released a detailed guidance note.

We have also been in contact with Broadmoor hospital itself in order to explore how we might extend our services for its patients. We are currently in discussions with a view to producing a 'Code and You' document specifically designed to empower patients to complain. If this proves successful, we will seek to introduce the scheme to other special hospitals around the United Kingdom.

These steps, together with the PCC case law accessible on our website, provides a clear framework within which complaints can be made by – or on behalf of – those directly affected by the reporting. It has, I believe, led to a considerable improvement in standards of reporting.

However, as you know, the PCC does not generally investigate complaints without the co-operation or consent of the person at the centre of an article or someone who has legal responsibility for them. This is precisely because – as you state – sometimes people do not wish to complain. The PCC has always respected that wish.

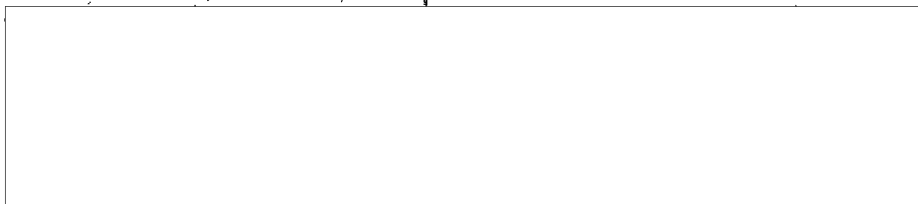
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After all, our primary aim to resolve a complaint relies upon the involvement of the interested party: it is not possible to obtain what action a person may want, without a knowledge of what that entails. Furthermore, our main sanction against a newspaper is a critical adjudication published with due prominence by that newspaper as well as on our website. The PCC would not wish to be party to such publicity, if unwelcome to the person at the centre of the initial coverage.

In this case, therefore, it would not appear possible for us to initiate a full investigation. That notwithstanding, you are certainly right to raise this issue – as with any other – with the PCC and I will ensure that your comments are given due consideration by the Commission.

With best wishes.



Tim Toulmin