

Increase in children in psychiatric care – survey

SEVENTEEN children in their early teens were being hospitalised in Irish psychiatric facilities on one night in March last year, new figures show.

The figures emerged from a snapshot survey that is carried every three years.

The report by the Health Research Board shows that on March 31 last, 84 under-18s were receiving psychiatric in-patient care, out of a total of 2,480 patients. The equivalent figures for 2013, the last year the survey was taken, was 64, which was itself an increase from 43 in 2010.

The majority of young patients were aged 16 or under, with 17 patients aged 13 and 14. Almost two-thirds of young in-patients were female. Twenty-two under-18s had a primary diagnosis of a

By **Linda McGrory**

depressive disorder while 14 patients had a diagnosis of an eating disorder. Schizophrenia and neuroses were among the conditions for which young people received treatment last year.

The figures were collated from a census of psychiatric hospitals and units around the country on March 31, 2016. The survey is undertaken every three years.

The latest census shows there were 2,480 resident in-patients in psychiatric facilities on that date – seven more than in 2013.

Almost one-third (about 800) of patients had a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia; 422 patients had a depressive disorder; almost 300 had an organic mental disorder and 124 patients had an intel-

lectual disability. Males accounted for over half of all patients while more than one in three were aged 65 or over. Some 17% of in-patients (422) were involuntary admissions compared to 13% in 2010 and 15% in 2013.

The Health Research Board also outlined details of censuses taken over the last 50 years.

The data shows an 88% drop in in-patient numbers since 1963 and a 62% drop in involuntary hospitalisations since 1971.

The board said the increased figure of 84 child residents, compared to previous surveys, was 'a reflection of increased capacity in child in-patient services'.

Health Research Board chief executive Dr Graham Love said: 'These data are crucial to inform decisions about service planning.'

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Thanks to my son, much I have learned

ON my desk sits a small figure of Jedi Master Yoda from the Star Wars movies. For those unacquainted with the epic saga, Yoda is a tiny green creature who is considered the greatest of all Jedi knights. The Jedi are a priestly caste that uphold peace and justice throughout the Galaxy.

And why, pray tell, do I have such a figure peering at me as I write? Living, as I do, with three Star Wars fanatics, it is difficult to escape the drama. Yesterday, I nearly fell down the stairs trying to avoid a Star Wars battle scene.

My boys love the idea of courage confronting evil in a bid to restore harmony and justice. In Star Wars, the evil empire is governed by Jedi who have turned to the 'dark side' and who are intent on eliminating their noble opponents.

The fact that the Jedi are spiritual masters only adds to their mystique and allure.

Yoda has trained Jedi for 900 years, is immensely powerful despite his diminutive size, and derives his power from the energy field surrounding all creation. Through silence and meditation, he draws inspiration, power and insight from 'the Force'. As he famously says: 'My ally is the Force, and a powerful ally it is.'

As a warrior monk, Yoda speaks much wisdom. That is why, as sci-fi characters go, he is by far my favourite. Through him, the children of 'Cyberia' catch a glimpse of the great wisdom tradition that flows downstream from Confucius, Plato and Gandhi.

Our middle son considers it curious that I, of all people, should be interested in Star Wars. It is not, mind you, that I have a choice given my domestic circumstances. The old adage often comes to mind: If you can't beat them, join them.

'Here you are, Dad. Now you can always think of me and Yoda!' With those words, my son handed me the little figure that now sits on my desk. Whenever it catches my eye, I cannot help but smile.

Looking at it, I am reminded that some serious university professors have studied Yoda's unusual syntax. He has a peculiar habit of jumbling object, subject and verb, resulting in sentences such as, 'Into exile I must go' or 'Wars not make one great'. Somehow, such sentences stick in the mind.

Wisdom comes in many forms, but the most effective is that of simplicity. Think of this timeless maxim: 'Do unto others as you would have them do to you', or 'You who has not sinned cast the first stone.'

They resound through the ages, not

only because of their inherent truth, but because they are wrapped in simplicity.

Yoda excels at this when he says things like, 'Truly wonderful the mind of a child is'. I have learned so much as a parent, but this fact towers above all the rest. The beauty of a child's mind, its ability to see into the very depths of life, never ceases to amaze me.

The little boy to whom I owe this column, has taught me so much about life and about myself. Through his simple insights, I have seen things to which I was previously blind. It is as though he came into the world blessed with wisdom.

Children teach because they don't complicate things. They see the world as it was meant to be seen. Indeed, the older I get the more I realise that only through a child's eyes are we capable of seeing the truth.

Here is Yoda at his best: 'Do. Or do not. There is no try.' How often do we stall and prevaricate when faced with objectives, goals or tasks? How often do we allow our fear of failure stand in the way of our heart's desire?

Children don't dither. They just do. And if they fail, they do and do again.

Such is the secret of true achievement, and it is one reason why we all need to become childlike. We must, as Yoda puts it, 'unlearn what you have learned'. In order to reap the true benefits and beauty of life, we must fearlessly and faithfully launch out into the deep.

We do that simply by doing. 'Size matters not. Look at me,' says the pint-size Yoda, meaning that the only barriers to our aspirations are, very often, the ones we ourselves construct. Unlearning what we have learned is the process by which we go forward with the pure faith of a child.

IN so many ways, my children have taught me to unlearn what I have learned. They have taught me to delight in little things I might otherwise have dismissed. They have taught me to stop trying and to start doing.

After all, there is nothing so inspirational as a child's courage. Despite their fears and hesitations, there is virtually no challenge to which they will not rise. And it is this which teaches them to love and embrace life for all it is worth.

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry when my little boy said: 'You like Yoda and he is kind of like you.' In obvious distress, I replied: 'Surely, I don't resemble a little green creature with large pointy ears?' He laughed before quickly massaging my misplaced vanity: 'You know what I mean, Dad!'

He ran from the room before I could say: 'Know what you mean, I do not. Mean what you do, you must.'

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