Revisiting the Cartwright Report

On page 157 of her report Sylvia Cartwright stated that only a minority of women patients or relations of patients she spoke to had a grievance about their treatment. She then unjustifiably claimed that the people without grievance (“the vast majority” of the people she contacted) were so unaware of the nature of the condition, that they could not formulate a complaint. If the arrogance of this approach did not ring warning bells with her advisors, Charlotte Paul and Lowell Goddard, surely the impossibility of confirming the claim should have.

On page 95 of the report Sylvia Cartwright concluded that the Metro article was extensively researched and professionally written and displayed understanding that “few lay people could hope to achieve.” Yet the Metro article began the misconception of the “group two women who had limited or no treatment,” a misconception which has drifted into the popular headline, “Women were denied treatment….”

As a “lay person” herself, Sylvia Cartwright was let down by her advisors who failed to correct her misinterpretations. This lack of professional guidance resulted in justice being denied to (among others) our father and father-in-law, Herb Green.

Misconceptions continue to this day and must be partly responsible for the lack of acceptance of the Cartwright report—a situation probably unique in the history of commissions of enquiry in New Zealand.

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