

Winding Up

Leap of Faith

Growing up is a difficult business. (I found it so, anyway. Still do, actually). The process of maturation is a journey from relative dependence to relative independence, often with variable but increasing confidence chasing a moving target of expectation. Eating disorders usually start in the midst of this process. They arguably arise out of it in some sense and certainly complicate it. Our services have to straddle this gap between child and adult. They do so rather uncomfortably at times.

At the child end, our patients are seen as individuals but as operating in a necessary context of parents or other caregivers. If push comes to shove, the child is not the only person with rights and responsibilities. With adults, the patient may still be viewed in the context of her relationships with others but she is now responsible for herself. Others cannot call the shots except perhaps in extremis. The two sides of the divide are clear enough but that may not help the individual sufferer in the midst of the transition.

Services usually have either a 'child' or an 'adult' emphasis. On each side the crucial issues of responsibility are managed differently. This reflects real life and the solution of having 'young people's services' may have merit but only if there is a notable flexibility of approach within the service. More often such flexibility needs to be enacted between services.

I work with adults—or over 16s anyway. Sometimes I have to try hard to resist having a jaundiced view of the practice of those who work with children and adolescents. This is because any patients of theirs whom I see are likely to be 'graduating' to the adult service because they have not done well. I do not see those who do well. To come into land in a clearly adult service sometimes provides a useful fresh start. But usually it is just difficult for the young patient, for the parents—and for us. The irritating part for us clinicians is that it is we who have to be so balanced and mature and see all sides and . . . all that grown-up stuff. After all, we know that we have the easiest end of it. However, there is nothing like a troublesome late adolescent for making one feel—well, adolescent, really. Personally, I have a drink, slump in front of the television and grunt if anyone comes near. I am very grown up.

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