AIMS For a better birth...

Dr Betty Tylden 1918 - 2009

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Betty Tylden was an eminent family psychiatrist who, for several decades, helped many AIMS patients traumatised by experiences in childbirth. She was the most kind, motherly, patient and sympathetic person on the planet, we think, and completely non-judgmental. She was all too aware of the insensitivity and sometimes brutality of many doctors, particularly in obstetrics and gynaecology. She died on 3 February 2009 aged 91, having worked until 2005. She had a particular interest in post-traumatic stress disorder, and recognised and treated it long before it was widely recognised. She was called as an expert witness in child abuse cases and was well known for her work with adult survivors of child abuse and people traumatised by religious cults that use mind control techniques.

People with PTSD suffered symptoms ranging from depression, mood swings, feelings of guilt and a loss of self-worth to episodes of dissociation, when the individual feels detached from his or her own mental processes or body. In extreme forms this led to hallucinations and 'hearing voices'; in the longer term to such behaviour as substance abuse, self-mutilation and suicide.

Betty Tylden had become interested in psychological trauma during the war, when she worked as a registrar at St. Thomas's Hospital in London under the pioneering psychiatrist William Sargant, dealing with people traumatised by the Blitz and soldiers suffering from battle exhaustion. In the 1980s and 1990s she became known for her work with former members of religious and New Age cults, some being cared for by their exhausted families and others incarcerated in secure hospitals or prisons and often diagnosed as schizophrenic. She argued that such patients were not suffering from psychosis, but were exhibiting normal 'survival reactions' to the trauma to which they had been subjected.

Betty was born in rural South Africa. Her father was a Boer-war army officer and her mother died when she was young. She came to Britain to boarding school and studied medicine at Girton College, Cambridge and St. Thomas's Hospital, which took a high proportion of traumatised war-wounded. In 1946 she married George Morgan, a fellow psychiatrist, but kept her maiden name as there were two other Elizabeth Morgans on the medical register.

Betty Tylden developed a particular interest in women's mental health and family relationships. She and two other professional couples bought a grand house, St. Julian's near Sevenoaks, which they ran as a commune so that the wives could pursue their careers while raising their children. She worked in child and family psychiatry at Bromley hospital from 1949, becoming a consultant in 1960. In the early 1960s she and her husband established Stepping Stones, the country's first supported 'Care in the Community' scheme. At the same time she worked parttime as a liaison psychiatrist in the departments of obstetrics and of academic medicine at University College Hospital, where she established the country's first drug

abuse clinic. After formally retiring in 1985 she worked in private practice until failing health forced her retirement in 2004. Unlike many private psychiatrists, she had little interest in money: she had paying patients, non-paying patients, and borrowing patients. Her death leaves a gap in AIMS's resources, and we welcome suggestions for psychiatrists or counsellors who can replace her.