Introduction

This chapter begins by retracing the steps from the start of the 1990s, to nearly a decade earlier. The previous chapter attempted to demonstrate the way in which scandals in the institutional care of those with mental health difficulties were extinguished in the years after Ely, both by the repetitive nature of events uncovered and by the grip which care in the community came to exercise over policy-making in this field. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the demise of that policy hegemony, and the part played by scandal in reviving public concern, not now about institutional conditions and practices, but about the release into the community of mentally ill people. In order to explore some important elements of scandal itself in this regard, however, it is important to look back at the first case, during this period, of a Public Inquiry involving a death caused by a discharged mental patient. In doing so, two major purposes will be pursued: firstly to consider the policy issues raised and secondly to ask the question, why did this not become a landmark scandal?

Isabel Schwartz

On 6 July 1984 Isabel Schwartz, then a social worker employed by Bexley Council, was killed at her office at Bexley Hospital in Kent. She had been stabbed to death by a former client, Sharon Campbell. Ms Campbell was arrested and charged with murder. On 22 August 1985 she was committed to Broadmoor, having been found mentally unfit to stand trial. Almost two years later, following extensive pressure from Dr Victor Schwartz, Isabel Schwartz's father, a Public Inquiry was appointed by the
Secretary of State. By the time the Inquiry reported in July 1988, fully four years had elapsed since the death had taken place.

The focus of this chapter moves from the institutional care of people with mental health difficulties to their care in the community. In 1984, Bexley Hospital itself was in a period of continuing transition. It was yet another of those Victorian asylums, set in 100 acres of largely open land whose patient numbers – 900 in 1984 – were in sharp decline. The Inquiry traces a large number of themes which were to become familiar in later years, despite its own failure to achieve landmark or emblematic status.

**Revolving door**

Sharon Campbell’s behaviour first began to give cause for concern in 1980. The immediate series of events thereafter is worth tracing in a little detail, because it set in train a pattern which was to become familiar in the years which followed. In the first weeks of June 1980, immediately after the onset of Sharon Campbell’s illness, medical and social services were quickly mobilised as continuing disturbances at home led to her moving to live away from her family. A brief weekend at a hostel for black adolescents in Brixton found her still ‘disturbed and psychotic’ (11). It was agreed, on 16 June, that she should be admitted to hospital on a voluntary basis. On 24 June, against medical advice, she discharged herself and returned home. On 25 June she was readmitted to Bexley Hospital, leaving once more on the same day before being returned for a third time in 24 hours, by the police, following a further domestic disturbance. On 30 June Ms Campbell discharged herself once more, before agreeing to return to inpatient treatment under medical supervision.

This acute pattern of discharge and readmission was to become characteristic of Sharon Campbell’s history. It was one replicated far more widely. Rogers and Pilgrim (1996: 76) suggest that the pattern had already been established: ‘by the late 1970s’ they write, ‘the new service pattern becoming discernible was one of revolving-door patients going in and out of acute psychiatric units but being backed up by sparse and unevenly distributed social service facilities’.

**Compulsory treatment?**

The medical management of Sharon Campbell’s case was also, from the outset, dominated by a problem which the Inquiry identified as one in which ‘a patient [is] unwilling to take medication and unwilling to go or to stay in hospital’ (11). The events of June 1980 were resolved, at least