

## BOOK REVIEW

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### A Review of *Wyatt v. Stickney: Retrospect and Prospect*

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**REFERENCE:** Jones, L. R. and Parlour, R. R., Eds., *Wyatt v. Stickney: Retrospect and Prospect*, Grune and Stratton, New York, 1981, 245 pages, no price listed.

This rather small (245 pages) book is the most comprehensive review of perhaps the most important case on the right to treatment for psychiatric patients. The book, based on presentations at a conference on the rights of mental patients held at the University of Alabama, Ferguson Center, 25-26 Sept. 1980, is edited by two psychiatrists from the University of Alabama, both of whom have had intimate contact with the *Wyatt* case and its consequences.

The contributors to the book, which contains 16 chapters including a panel discussion and a summary chapter by the editors, are well-known participants in the *Wyatt* case or are current officials in Alabama or in other states that have been influenced by the *Wyatt* decision. For example, Dr. Abraham Heller has applied the *Wyatt* case to the Ohio patients in the Lima State Hospital case. Dr. Milton Greenblatt, who also wrote the foreword to the book, comments on his chapter on *Wyatt* as a study in "psychopolitics." Other participants in the conference include the attorney who represented Ricky Wyatt; the current Alabama commissioner of mental health, Dr. Stonewall Stickney, the defendant in the case and the first commissioner of mental health for the State of Alabama; the journalist covering the *Wyatt* case; and an associate justice of the Alabama Supreme Court.

The book is well organized into easily readable chapters and documents the importance of this highly publicized case from which a number of other cases have emerged and out of which much mental health legislation was written or influenced.

Perhaps the most significant, and certainly the longest, chapter is the one entitled "How *Wyatt* Affected Patients" by P. J. Leaf and M. M. Holt. In that chapter, the authors document the follow-up conditions of the patients who were influenced and affected by the *Wyatt* decision. *Wyatt v. Stickney* has not only affected patients in Alabama hospitals, but it also may be regarded as a ground-breaking case in mental health law that has widely influenced the care and treatment of psychiatric patients throughout the country.

Judge Frank Johnson, who decided the case following input from various national professional organizations, developed a set of standards of care and treatment for involuntarily committed mental patients that have continued to the present time.

As a document of this significant and revolutionary case that sets the federal judicial system

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against the legislature of Alabama, this book is of historical import and is necessary reading for serious students of mental health law. Perhaps the one weakness in the book is the manner of its publication, utilizing photocopy of typewritten materials rather than typeset printing. This format gives the book a feeling of temporariness rather than one of permanence, which is its due as an historical document.

The book is based on the proceedings of a conference on this most important subject—a conference that should be repeated at least every five to ten years to reconsider the effects of *Wyatt* and other cases on the treatment of mental patients. We must continue to be diligent in providing the highest quality of care to our patients, and for this purpose the book reminds us that we cannot do it alone, but we require the comprehensive services of the lawmakers, the judiciary, and society. Some of the material may appear parochial to Alabama but may apply equally well in other states. Right-to-treatment cases will not end with *Wyatt*, but the lessons of *Wyatt* must not be forgotten.