# Survivors recount trauma of Dr Sargant’s deep sleep therapy at Royal Waterloo Hospital



In an exploration of a dark chapter in British medical history, Jon Stock's "The Sleep Room: A Very British Medical Scandal" delves into the harrowing accounts of young women subjected to distressing treatments at the Royal Waterloo Hospital during the 1960s and 1970s. Described through the chilling experiences of several former patients, the book paints a vivid picture of a facility that once housed these individuals under the control of Dr William Sargant.

The Royal Waterloo Hospital, an annexe to St Thomas’ Hospital located opposite Waterloo Station, became notorious for its practices. Within its walls, a cohort of girls and young women, referred to as the 'Sleeping Beauties', endured prolonged periods of drug-induced slumber. The hospital dormitory was characterised by its airless atmosphere and a pervasive musty smell, where patients would be kept in a semi-darkened state for up to 20 hours each day. Every six hours, nurses would rouse them to use the lavatory, yet the medical procedures conducted without informed consent raised severe ethical questions.

Dr Sargant, who spearheaded this controversial 'deep sleep therapy', believed in treating mental health as a physical ailment. He eschewed traditional psychotherapy, labelling it as ineffective. Instead, Sargant promoted the use of continuous narcosis combined with electro-convulsive therapy (ECT), asserting that this approach could fundamentally 're-programme troubled minds'. However, the legacy of these treatments has been troubling, often leading to more harm than healing.

Among the patients, actress Celia Imrie recounts her experiences after being admitted at the tender age of 14 due to anorexia. She was administered high doses of Largactil, an antipsychotic medication, which left her with debilitating side effects, including double vision and tremors. Imrie spoke candidly about her ordeal, stating, “I think I had what was called ‘sub-coma shock treatment’... but it was enough to make you drowsy, weak, sweaty and hungry.” Her narrative highlights the disempowerment she felt while under Sargant's control.

Linda Keith, a former Vogue model, entered Ward Five at 23 and underwent a staggering 50 sessions of ECT. Keith described the aftermath of her treatment, saying, “I’d been rendered completely helpless.” She lost basic cognitive functions, including the ability to read, and expressed her frustration at her condition upon seeing Sargant years later.

Stock's book also touches upon the wider implications of Sargant’s methods, suggesting possible links between his work and secretive government research initiatives, including experiments conducted at Porton Down. Although he does not definitively clarify these connections, he raises questions about the ethical underpinnings of psychological experiments during that era.

This illuminating yet chilling investigation into Sargant’s treatment is underscored by the collective voices of survivors, who contribute to a narrative that compels reflection on the extremes of psychiatric care in a not-so-distant past. Their memories linger hauntingly, serving as a reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by those seeking treatment and the potential for abuse in the name of medical innovation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Sargant> - The Wikipedia page on William Sargant provides comprehensive information about his career, including his promotion of deep sleep therapy and ECT at St Thomas' Hospital and the Royal Waterloo Hospital, as well as his belief in treating mental health as a physical ailment.
3. <https://drwilliamsargant.wordpress.com/2013/09/22/william-sargant-at-st-thomas-and-the-royal-waterloo/> - This blog post discusses the practices at the Royal Waterloo Hospital under Dr. Sargant, including the use of deep sleep therapy and ECT, and the lack of informed consent from patients.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_sleep_therapy> - The Wikipedia article on deep sleep therapy explains the controversial practice of keeping patients unconscious for extended periods using drugs, a method employed by Dr. Sargant at the Royal Waterloo Hospital.
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