BEHAVIOR

A 'landmark' for the retarded

In what many proponents consider a landmark decision in mental retardation, a federal judge in Maine has signed into law a decree protecting the civil rights of mentally retarded persons in that state. The decree, signed by Judge Edward T. Gignoux, affirms the right of mentally retarded persons released from an institution into the community to receive "habilitation, including medical treatment, education, training and care, suited to their needs, regardless of age, degree of retardation or handicapping condition."

The decision is the result of a suit brought in July 1975, by nearly 500 residents of the Pineland Center in Pownell, Maine, and another 500 persons who had been placed outside the institution. The suit charged that the patients were denied treatment and unnecessarily retained at Pineland — in some cases for more than 10 years — awaiting the development of community placements.

The court decree orders the institution to establish adequate aftercare facilities and upgrade care and placement services considerably. Spokesmen for the Mental Health Law Project, which represented the patients and ex-patients in the case, say the decree "heralds the beginning of a new era for mentally retarded citizens in Maine. In addition, it will serve as a model for the development of a comprehensive community service system for mentally retarded persons ... nationwide."

Previous "right to treatment" decisions in New York had guaranteed residents of mental retardation facilities protection from harm and established their right to placement in community settings, according to MHLP lawyers.

One hundred degree-years

Everything, and perhaps more, that you wanted to know about Ph.D. recipients during the past century is now available in a series of analyses recently completed by the National Research Council. The report, *A Century of Doctorates,* covers the period from 1861, when the first Ph.D.s were granted in the United States at Yale, to 1974. Some of the highlights include:

- The number of Ph.D.s graduating per year is now about 33,000, compared with an average of 40 a century ago.
- Since 1970, the fastest growing Ph.D. fields include engineering, education and psychology — all "applied" areas; the proportion of degrees in the natural sciences has diminished.
- The Midwest is closing in on the northeastern corner of the country as the leading region for granting Ph.D.s. The West has risen rapidly since World War II but has almost been surpassed by the South, where doctorate-level education was almost nonexistent in 1920.
- Women Ph.D.s tend to come from slightly better educated families than do male recipients.
- Black and American Indian Ph.D.s concentrate in education, and Orientals in engineering, mathematics and physical science fields.
- Although the traditional employment for new Ph.D.s has been in universities, a growing number have taken a variety of postdoctoral appointments as interim employment while seeking other types of permanent jobs.

Alcohol and sex: The desire's there ...

Alcohol's apparent ability to simultaneously increase sexual desire while also contributing to impotence in some men has puzzled researchers for some time. Investigators at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass., and Harvard University, however, think they may now have a clue to the paradoxical mechanism.

Based on a study of 16 healthy, nonalcoholic males, McLean's Jack Mendelson reports that alcohol depresses levels of testosterone, which regulates sexual potency. But at the same time, it apparently triggers high production of luteinizing hormone (LH), a "messenger" hormone produced in the pituitary, which tells the testes when to produce testosterone. This apparently produces the confusing state of heightened desire and lowered performance, says Mendelson.

The researchers speculate that alcohol affects the peripheral systems involved in the synthesis of testosterone, rather than the central mechanism governing sex hormone production.

Washoe gets pregnant: Chapter 2

Univ. of Okla.

On the matter of Washoe's pregnancy, there are two basic questions — one of considerable scientific import and the other of consequence only to her and the gossip columnists. Washoe, the first chimpanzee to learn human sign language, lost her first infant hours after its birth August 19, 1976. The next baby is predicted to be born around Feb. 1, 1979.

University of Oklahoma psychologist Roger Fouts and his colleagues are unsure about the answer to the lesser of the two questions: Who is the father? They believe it may be Ally, a long-time friend of Washoe and also conversant in Amerslan, the sign language of the deaf. Ally has a vocabulary of 150 signs, about 50 fewer than that of Washoe.

But the researchers are more concerned with the major question, which will not be answered until after the baby chimp is born: Will Washoe transmit her knowledge to her offspring? Some scientists doubt the chimp's ability to pass on language learned from humans. But Fouts disagrees. "The main thing we'll be looking for is the possibility of cultural transmission of a learned language across generations," he says. "We'll keep Washoe and the baby restricted from most humans, and we'll restrict the number of signs we use around the infant to preclude his imitating human signs." The researchers will primarily avoid simple signs such as "hug," "drink," "come," "tickle" and "play," which they think may have the highest probability for the young chimp to acquire.

Washoe's first baby died after the umbilical cord broke during birth, cutting off part of the infant's blood supply. An autopsy also revealed that the baby chimp suffered from a congential heart defect. Medical examinations now, however, indicate that Washoe can expect to deliver a normal, healthy infant.

New behavioral journal

A major, new journal — THE BEHAVIORAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES — has begun publishing in Princeton, N.J. The journal, published by Cambridge University Press, includes along with theory and research reports extensive commentary and review of each article by peers of each scientist/author.

Adopting the "open peer commentary" model utilized by CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY, BBS Editor Stevan Harnad says that "the behavioral and brain sciences will be a fertile soil for implementing the open peer commentary service."

The journal will include articles in behavioral biology, cognitive science, neuroscience and psychology. The first issue contains reports on "command neurons," adaptive behavior, sensory feedback in voluntary movements and computational research models.