

behavioral sciences notes

MENTAL HEALTH

An alternative to hospitals

A significant new approach to the treatment of mental patients has proved promising in pilot studies.

Undertaken by the University Medical Center in Denver and supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, the new tack represents a form of family intervention. The mental patient himself is not hospitalized; instead he is kept at home while a psychiatric team works on some specific family condition to restore balance and the patient's functioning.

Efforts to restore functioning often began very simply. A nurse, for instance, would put a mop in a housewife's hand and stay with her until the floor was clean. She would be urged to cook a meal. A son would be asked to weed the yard or a daughter to return to school. Average treatment consisted of five office visits, one home visit and telephone calls.

The decision to handle family situations rather than treating only the patient in hospitals stems from belief that a mental crisis is precipitated by some specific change in family conditions. The goal is to identify that change and restore balance.

Results gained from crisis therapy proved to be comparable with hospital treatment and far less expensive. Of 75 patients treated, more than 80 percent did not later require hospitalization, and on measures of social and personal adjustment, they did as well as the 75 hospitalized patients.

PARAPSYCHOLOGY

ESP registry established

An agency for collecting and evaluating premonitions has been established in New York. Modeled after London's year-old bureau, the Central Premonitions Registry will invite individuals with dreams or other premonitions of state, national and international events to submit them.

A four-man investigative panel including Dr. Stanley Krippner of Maimonides Medical Center in New York, which has been studying the parapsychology of dreams for several years, will keep a record on the accuracy of premonitions.

In its first year of operation, the London bureau collected 469 premonitions. London psychiatrist R. D. Barker has reported that 18 of these proved true. Two people were responsible for 12 of the 18 and they are now under intensive study.

PSYCHOBIOLOGY

Inoculations increase growth

Children vaccinated before the age of two may grow taller than they would otherwise. This rather startling development can be explained in terms of emotional stress and a change in hormone balance.

Harvard's John W. M. Whiting, an authority on child development, and Stanford University colleagues Thomas K. Landauer and Thomas M. Jones, pulled relevant data on vaccinations and stature from two well-known child growth studies in Berkeley and Ohio. The Berkeley study followed 80 boys and 90 girls from their birth in 1928 to

maturity. In Ohio, the Fels study followed 77 boys and 69 girls born between 1928 and 1944.

As a result of the emotional stress, the children inoculated before the age of two exceeded their predicted growth to a greater extent than those not treated.

Distress symptoms from inoculations are known to last two to three weeks. It is believed that stress at this early critical period permanently alters the endocrine balance and leads to increased growth. There is substantial evidence in rats that unusually stimulating experiences very early increase growth. And it has been reported that adult men in societies with such practices as infant inoculation, circumcision and scarification grow an average of two and one half inches taller than those societies without such practices. Disease prevention was not associated with the height data.

PSYCHIATRY

Panels analyze movies

An innovator in psychiatry, the Forest Hospital in Des Plaines, Illinois, has begun sending psychiatrists over to the local movie theater to analyze plot and character for theater audiences.

One aim of the project is to educate the general public about mental health. The panel discusses motivation and behavior in the film characters, relating the discussion to modern problems, such as the generation gap.

Forest Hospital has so far provided psychiatric panels for three films: "A Man for All Seasons," "In the Heat of the Night," and "The Taming of the Shrew."

As viewers enter the theater, they are given a card explaining the program and asked to note questions.

Initially bewildered by the procedure, audiences have begun warming to the psychiatric analysis, according to Forest Hospital.

ALCOHOLISM

Highway hazard defined

Small amounts of alcohol increase the likelihood of automobile accidents for the young and old, but not for the majority of drivers, those aged 25 through 54.

Such people who have taken one or two drinks before driving are no more likely to have an accident than those who have had nothing to drink.

But the younger and older drivers, while drinking less, are more affected by alcohol.

The conclusions come from the Center of Alcohol Studies at Rutgers University which has now concluded a five-year study of driving and drinking.

Those who constitute the greatest highway hazard fall into three groups: heavy drinkers in the middle age ranges with a blood alcohol concentration of .10 percent, indicating five or six drinks in the preceding hour; young people under 25 and old people past 70.

Among the heavy drinking drivers (.10 percent blood concentration) the largest percentage are divorced or separated. Bachelors and widowed people tend to be somewhat overrepresented, and the married are markedly underrepresented.

These highway hazards also tend to be out of work or employed in a low status job.