

PSYCHOLOGY

Physicians Fear Death

➤ **PHYSICIANS** are more afraid of death than are their patients.

In fact, Dr. Herman Feifel, psychologist of the Veterans Administration Outpatient Clinic and the University of Southern California School of Medicine, Los Angeles, reported one of the major reasons physicians enter a career in medicine is to control their own above-average fears concerning death.

Some of the obstacles thrown in the way of a study of the attitudes of critically ill patients toward death were described by Dr. Feifel at the American Psychological Association meeting in New York. Reluctance to discuss this taboo subject was encountered, not in patients, but in the physicians and hospital authorities.

"The one thing you never do," professional personnel told him, "is to discuss death with a patient."

When, finally, with the almost surreptitious help of a staff physician, Dr. Feifel was able to interview a small number of seriously ill patients, he met with "refreshing frankness and cooperativeness." An unexpected result was a psychotherapeutic effect in some of the patients as a result of the open discussion of their attitudes toward death.

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Hide Facts About Suicide

➤ **DIFFICULTIES** hindering research in another taboo area, suicide, were described to the American Psychological Association meeting in New York by Drs. Edwin S. Shneidman and Norman L. Farberow of the Suicide Prevention Center, Los Angeles.

Not only relatives, but responsible members of the community, join in efforts to cover up and hide the facts about suicide, Dr. Shneidman indicated. This attitude even affects the wording of death certificates. He told of individuals who obviously committed suicide by stabbing themselves in the chest but who were certified as natural death from heart failure or accidental death from running into a knife.

One sheriff-coroner has reported only a couple of dozen suicides for a city of over one-half million. A look at his files showed that he was reporting as suicide only those deaths where he had found a verified suicide note.

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Dog Can Be Therapist

➤ A **DOG** with which a problem child can romp, cuddle, and exchange love can actually serve as "co-therapist" to help in healing the child's emotional wounds, Dr. Boris M. Levinson of Yeshiva University, told the American Psychological Association meeting in New York.

A dog, Dr. Levinson said, can satisfy the child's need for physical contact and his need for loving safely without fear of losing

the love object. This dog can be a "companion, friend, servant, admirer, confidante, fellow conspirator, slave, scapegoat, mirror, trustee and defender."

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Mental Health Research

➤ **THE PSYCHOLOGIST** who wants to do research on community mental health must know how the local government functions, what the school system is trying to do and how local public health clinics operate, as well as other matters not ordinarily within his field, it was reported at the American Psychological Association meeting in New York.

The researcher in the field of community mental health must be a combination missionary and salesman in order to get the community to tolerate such an investigation, for many individuals will regard the intimate questions asked as a nuisance. But the psychologist must be careful not to oversell his product for the temptation is to promise more than psychologists can give. The psychologist has the responsibility to be sensitive to community needs while not sacri-

EDUCATION

Education Bill Urged

➤ **LEADING SCIENTISTS** and educators are convinced that full-scale continuation of the National Defense Education Act, blocked by the House Rules Committee, is a key factor in America's scientific progress.

They are not happy about the promised last-ditch drive to extend the law's student loan provisions before Congress adjourns. There are other provisions just as important to a balanced and progressive program, if not as attractive politically, they point out.

The original bill to extend the NDEA was tied to a controversial measure for private and parochial school loans. The Rules Committee refused to release it for a floor vote.

First passed in 1958, the act offers financial help to needy and able students through loans administered by colleges. The emphasis is on science, mathematics, engineering and foreign languages.

This single section of the many-sided program may get top pre-adjournment priority because, as one observer put it, "most Congressmen do not want to go home and tell their constituents that Junior can no longer get a loan to go to college and become a scientist."

The eight prominent signers of a statement urging Congress to extend the entire law are pleased with the loan set-up, but make equal mention of other major help toward the improvement of science and mathematics instruction brought about by NDEA.

Included are grants to high schools for

ficing his scientific values. The primary object of community mental health research is to find answers to questions such as these: Is mental illness more prevalent in slum areas or among the wealthy or those in moderate circumstances? Does the strain of driving to work in badly snarled traffic conditions lead to emotional breakdown? Does a well-administered local government help to build sound mental health? Do good sanitary conditions and the enforcement of wise public health regulations contribute to community mental health? Is there a relation between the prosperity of local churches and good mental health?

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Cancer Patient Gives Up

➤ **WHEN A PATIENT** is told he has cancer, he is likely to regard the diagnosis as hopeless despite the ever increasing number of survivors. Not infrequently, he reacts with anxiety and depression, Dr. Martha Schon, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, told the American Psychological Association meeting in New York.

Such a disturbed patient presents a treatment risk, Dr. Schon said, especially if surgery is involved. The active participation of a psychologist in the management of emotional problems helps not only the patient, but also the attending physician.

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laboratory equipment, books and teaching facilities; grants enabling states to hire mathematics supervisors and scientific consultants to improve classroom teaching; grants to widely scattered universities to develop new programs for graduate students, and grants to graduate students themselves to help them train to become college teachers, now greatly in demand.

"The job is well started, but far from complete," they maintain. "There is good momentum now. . . . These improvements in science education are too vital to the welfare of the nation to allow the act to be weakened."

The signers are Detlev W. Bronk, National Academy of Sciences president; James B. Conant, Harvard University president-emeritus; Lee A. DuBridge, California Institute of Technology president; Frederick L. Hovde, Purdue University president; James R. Killian, chairman of the Corporation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; George B. Kistiakowsky, Harvard chemistry professor; Thomas Park, president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; and J. A. Stratton, Massachusetts Institute of Technology president.

NDEA stays in effect until June 30, 1962, but states and educational institutions claim they need a year's lead time to provide matching funds to supplement the Government's share.

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