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Psychological Research and Mental Health: A Symposium

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Psychological Research and Mental Health A Symposium

LEONARD D. GOODSTEIN, State University of Iowa, Iowa City,
Chairman

“Mental Health Research in a Veterans Administration General
Hospital”

Edwin Cohen, Veterans Administration Hospital, Iowa City.

“Mental Health Research in an Academic Setting”

Alfred B. Heilbrun, Jr., State University of Iowa, Iowa City.

“Mental Health Research in a Psychopathic Hospital”

Irwin J. Knopf, Iowa Psychopathic Hospital, Iowa City.

“The Implications of Animal Research for Mental Health Problems”

Leon S. Otis, State University of Iowa, Iowa City.

Discussants:

James Freeman, Iowa State College, Ames, and

Leonard Worell, State University of Iowa, Iowa City.

A Statement of the Problem

By LEONARD D. GOODSTEIN

While discussions of the magnitude of the mental health problem here in Iowa and throughout the United States are commonplace, the facts and figures concerning this problem are nevertheless still quite overwhelming. For example, the average daily resident population in Iowa publicly supported mental hospitals for 1956 was 5,200 persons, while the national average was 556,000 (1); these figures exclude persons in federally supported hospitals, private hospitals and those receiving only out-patient treatment. The total expenditures for the maintenance of these patient populations (excluding capital improvements) in 1956 was \$6,900,000 in Iowa alone; the national total for 1956, again excluding the costs of federal hospitals, private hospitals, and out-patient care was \$662,000,000 (1). These population statistics are rather stable for the past three years while the expenditures keep rising. Mental health is clearly a problem of tremendous importance at this time and there has been considerable discussion of how best to deal with this problem in public and professional circles.

One aspect of the problem that has received considerable attention in recent months is the need for additional mental health personnel and the problems in finding properly trained personnel. It should, however, be clear from the history of physical medicine that when

effective treatment or preventative methods have been found, the problems of buildings, facilities *and* personnel have become soluble. For example, when the diet deficiency basis for pellagra was discovered, there were enough facilities to treat pellagra. The same became true for paresis when its infectious origin was discovered. Once effective drugs for the control of epilepsy were discovered, there were sufficient facilities and personnel to handle the problem. The development of adequate techniques for treating tuberculosis have led to the closing of many tuberculosis hospitals. It should be clear to all of us that the most promising source of relief for our mental health problems should lie in research.

While we are certainly not denying the need for adequate daily patient care in our mental hospitals, we do wish to emphasize the research need which seemingly is frequently neglected in public concern over mental health problems. The research need becomes more than obvious when one scans the pages of our texts in psychiatry and abnormal psychology. The gaps and limitations in our knowledge in this area are so striking that the research completed thus far can only be regarded as scratching the surface of the problem.

Research in mental health, like research on many complex problems, frequently requires an interdisciplinary approach but unlike other areas not all the members of the mental health team are research trained or research sophisticated or research interested. In practice it is frequently only the psychologist who has the training or experience to conceptualize and organize the research and who can supervise the technical aspects of the study.

The program today is an attempt to describe the mental health investigations with which psychologists have been concerned in four different work settings; each participant will discuss the particular problems imposed by such settings as well as the unique opportunities that are provided. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that, despite the problems and limitations involved, research is being executed on a variety of topics.

Literature Cited

1. *Public Health Reports*, Vol. 71, March, 1956.

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