
This compendium of twenty-four papers authored by distinguished theoreticians and practitioners attempts to bring to the professional in the mental health field a panoramic overview of the interlocking facets of "community psychiatry." Dr. Bellak, the handbook's able editor as well as one of its contributors, has succeeded in reducing, but by no means eliminating, the familiar liabilities that haunt multiple authorship of a major work on one principal theme. In addition to a refreshing diversity of outlook there is evidence among other things of conflicting and, perhaps, even antagonistic views among some of the authors. There are indications that some either misapprehended the essential purpose of this book or, perhaps more simply, erroneously regard what they are currently engaged in as examples of community psychiatry in action. But all criticisms seem minor when set against the contribution made by many of the unusually fine papers in clarifying the status of community psychiatry today and in offering directional clues for its future growth and development.

Dr. Bellak modifies his own description of community psychiatry—"the third major revolution in the history of psychiatry"—by acknowledging in a somewhat more earthbound moment that the term actually refers to an evolutionary refinement of our understanding of the interaction between the community and its people in sickness and in health. Each of us, if we are to be considered as reasonably well-functioning persons, must adapt continually to the reality pressures around us. One of the major functions of the mental health profession is to help bring this about via the numerous specialized techniques at their command. But these techniques, their application, and their differential use have undergone almost bewildering changes in the past two decades. The grave "faults" within a community are also seen as critically important factors in creating, exacerbating, or perpetuating deviant attitudes or behavior in individuals and groups of individuals. Finally, a genuine understanding of the "dynamics" within a community is at least as important as a thorough working knowledge of the intrapsychic phenomena that govern individual behavior.

Let it be said here that one cannot easily dismiss the burgeoning concepts of community psychiatry even as they are painstakingly discussed in the handbook with "Ah, so that's it. Why, we've been doing that all along and called it just good psychiatry [or good social work or good counseling or good what-have-you]." To be quickly disabused, one need but read the section on the training of the community psychiatrist (Bernard) or the detailed examination of what constitutes a community in the context of community psychiatry (Howe) or the deeper understanding of the interdependence between, for example, the community, law, and psychiatry (Roche). Interestingly, one comes to view the community not as a small geographic entity but as a worldwide interrelated unit with leadership and exemplary advancement in practice evident in the most unexpected places (Ross).

The handbook's accomplishment must be viewed against Dr. Bellak's own statement of the book's purpose, which is to further an enlightened program to combat mental illness such as was espoused by the late President Kennedy. Dr. Bellak says:

The stated goals of this program are to seek out and eradicate the causes of mental illness and to strengthen the knowledge and the manpower to sustain the attack. Thus, this measure might be considered to constitute the Magna Charta of community psychiatry, for it is designed to guarantee and safeguard, to a degree previously undreamed of, a basic human right—the privilege of mental health.

All our new discoveries and inventions—psychoactive drugs, day and night hospitals, halfway houses, and similar innovations—are essential and welcome therapeutic tools of the community psychiatrist. But the sine qua non rests on the most skilled use of the latter's understanding of the contribution and the responsibility that the community and its individuals must assume. If there is a major
weakness of the book, this reviewer would see it as being an overly timid effort to anticipate or discuss how a “multifaceted program which addresses itself to [the] psychiatric problems of the community as a whole” would be conceived and how it would be made to work. Indeed, Dr. Bellak affirms this by observing that “eventually it may be a function of community psychiatric clinics to anticipate and deal with emotional crises in the population that are precipitated by factors as diverse as widespread unemployment, the threat of atomic fallout, or—in certain communities—by court rulings on desegregation.” It is self-evident that eventually is rapidly becoming now and community psychiatrists along with the rest of us may need to be reminded of Victor Hugo’s classic observation, “Nothing in the world is stronger than an idea whose time has come.”

Beginner and seasoned practitioner alike are bound to find a great deal of interest—even provocation—in the book.

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Mental Retardation—A Review of Research.
Edited by Harvey E. Stevens and Rick Heber.

“Mental retardation is not a single disease entity but a set of symptoms developing from many different aetiologic factors” (p. 454). This quotation from the section on behavioral disturbances in the mentally retarded characterizes in one brief, clear sentence the complex nature of mental retardation; it could also serve as a text to illustrate the approach to the subject that is the keynote of this book.

Twelve writers distinguished in the different areas of learning that are concerned with retardation discuss and evaluate the research endeavors that have been undertaken in each one’s special field of interest. The themes thus treated are evaluation and diagnosis, education, learning and performance, personality, environmental factors in relation to intellectual functioning, social occupational adjustment, epidemiology, biochemistry and clinical correlations, genetics, teratogenesis of the central nervous system, neuropathology, and behavioral disturbances. An introductory summary by one of the editors gives an over-all unifying view. These specialized segments dovetail into a comprehensive picture of retardation, with its origins, manifestations, and resultant problems demonstrated in all their interdisciplinary relatedness. Although four of the chapters may be too technical in content for nonscientific readers to grasp more than superficially, their inclusion is valuable in showing the causal chain that links basic biological or constitutional elements with the psychological, social, and sociological factors also involved.

By reason of its omnibus quality the book is recommended to all categories of professional workers who are either new to the field of retardation or, if experienced, wish to extend their knowledge beyond the limits of their own specialty. It might be regarded as a sort of Baedeker that introduces succinctly and interestingly the salient social and physical features of this relatively unfamiliar terrain. It contains well over a thousand references, so its bibliographical value is considerable. The text is consistently well written in a refreshing, clear, jargon-free style that suggests the comfortable confidence of writers thoroughly conversant with their subject.

One of the great attractions of the book is its wide scope—the authors review the literature on retardation over a time span of at least half a century and across a geographic range that covers not only Europe and the United States, but also China and Iran. This shows the present magnitude of this medicopsychosocial problem that diminishes so many human beings in their capacity for self-fulfillment. The chapters dealing with the clinical aspects and environmental causes cast future shadows in their implications for preventive measures.

One other intensely valuable feature of the book is the dynamic, flexible, and even optimistic conception all the authors have of mental retardation. They present it less as a simple, static, and mainly irreversible condition and more as a highly complex interacting set of